Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

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The Tomb

"Red tongues of flame and searing gusts of heat engulfed the house."

by H. P. Lovecraft

Sedibus ut saltem placidis in morte quiescam.—*Virgil.*

IN RELATING the circumstances which have led to my confinement within this refuge for the demented, I am aware that my present position will create a natural doubt of the authenticity of my narrative. It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience. Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of supersight which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism.

My name is Jervas Dudley, and from earliest childhood I have been a dreamer and a visionary. Wealthy beyond the necessity of a commercial life, and temperamentally unfitted for the formal studies and social recreations of my acquaintances, I have dwelt ever in realms apart from the visible world; spending my youth and adolescence in ancient and little known books, and in roaming the fields and groves of the region near my ancestral home. I do not think that what I read in these books or saw in these fields and groves was exactly what other boys read and saw there; but of this I must say little, since detailed speech would but confirm those cruel slanders upon my intellect which I sometimes overhear from the whispers of the stealthy attendants around me. It is sufficient for me to relate events without analyzing causes.

I have said that I dwelt apart from the visible world, but I have not said that I dwelt alone. This no human creature may do; for lacking the fellowship of the living, he inevitably draws upon the companionship of things that are not, or are no longer, living. Close by my home there lies a singular wooded hollow, in whose twilight deeps I spent most of my time; reading, thinking, and dreaming. Down its moss-covered slopes my first steps of infancy were taken, and around its grotesquely gnarled oak trees my first fancies of boyhood were woven. Well did I come to know the presiding dryads of those trees, and often have I watched their wild

dances in the struggling beams of a waning moon—but of these things I must not now speak. I will tell only of the lone tomb in the darkest of the hillside thickets; the deserted tomb of the Hydes, an old and exalted family whose last direct descendant had been laid within its black recesses many decades before my birth.

The vault to which I refer is of ancient granite, weathered and discolored by the mists and dampness of generations. Excavated back into the hillside, the structure is visible only at the entrance. The door, a ponderous and forbidding slab of stone, hangs upon rusted iron hinges, and is fastened ajar in a queerly sinister way by means of heavy iron chains and padlocks, according to a gruesome fashion of half a century ago. The abode of the race whose scions are here inurned had once crowned the declivity which holds the tomb, but had long since fallen victim to the flames which sprang up from a stroke of lightning. Of the midnight storm which destroyed this gloomy mansion, the older inhabitants of the region sometimes speak in hushed and uneasy voices; alluding to what they call "divine wrath" in a manner that in later years vaguely increased the always strong fascination which I had felt for the forest-darkened sepulcher. One man only had perished in the fire. When the last of the Hydes was buried in this place of shade and stillness, the sad urnful of ashes had come from a distant land; to which the family had repaired when the mansion burned down. No one remains to lay flowers before the granite portal, and few care to brave the depressing shadows which seem to linger strangely about the water-worn stones.

I shall never forget the afternoon when first I stumbled upon the half-hidden house of death. It was in midsummer, when the alchemy of nature transmutes the sylvan landscape to one vivid and almost homogeneous mass of green; when the senses are well-nigh intoxicated with the surging seas of moist verdure and the subtly indefinable odors of the soil and the vegetation. In such surroundings the mind loses its perspective; time and space become trivial and unreal, and echoes of a forgotten prehistoric past beat insistently upon the enthralled consciousness.

All day I had been wandering through the mystic groves of the hollow; thinking thoughts I need not discuss, and conversing with things I need not name. In years a child of ten, I had seen and heard many wonders unknown to the throng; and was oddly aged in certain respects. When, upon forcing my way between two savage clumps of briars, I suddenly encountered the entrance of the vault, I had no knowledge of what I had discovered. The dark blocks of granite, the door so curiously ajar, and the funeral carvings above the arch, aroused in me no associations of mournful or terrible character. Of graves and tombs I knew and imagined much, but had on account of my peculiar temperament been kept from all personal contact with churchyards and cemeteries. The strange stone house on the woodland slope was to me only a source of interest and speculation; and its cold, damp interior, into which I vainly peered through the aperture so tantalizingly left, contained for me no hint of death or decay. But in that instant of curiosity was born the madly unreasoning desire which has brought me to this hell of confinement. Spurred on by a voice which must have come from the hideous soul of the forest, I resolved to enter the beckoning gloom in spite of the ponderous chains which barred my passage. In the waning light of day I alternately rattled the rusty impediments with a view to throwing wide the stone door, and essayed to squeeze

my slight form through the space already provided; but neither plan met with success. At first curious, I was now frantic; and when in the thickening twilight I returned to my home, I had sworn to the hundred gods of the grove that *at any cost* I would some day force an entrance to the black, chilly depths that seemed calling out to me. The physician with the iron-gray beard who comes each day to my room, once told a visitor that this decision marked the beginning of a pitiful monomania; but I will leave final judgment to my readers when they shall have learnt all.

The months following my discovery were spent in futile attempts to force the complicated padlock of the slightly open vault, and in carefully guarded inquiries regarding the nature and history of the structure. With the traditionally receptive ears of the small boy, I learned much; though an habitual secretiveness caused me to tell no one of my information or my resolve. It is perhaps worth mentioning that I was not at all surprized or terrified on learning of the nature of the vault. My rather original ideas regarding life and death had caused me to associate the cold clay with the breathing body in a vague fashion; and I felt that the great and sinister family of the burned-down mansion was in some way represented within the stone space I sought to explore. Mumbled tales of the weird rites and godless revels of bygone years in the ancient hall gave to me a new and potent interest in the tomb, before whose door I would sit for hours at a time each day. Once I thrust a candle within the nearly closed entrance, but could see nothing save a flight of damp stone steps leading downward. The odor of the place repelled yet bewitched me. I felt I had known it before, in a past remote beyond all recollection; beyond even my tenancy of the body I now possess.

The year after I first beheld the tomb, I stumbled upon a worm-eaten translation of Plutarch's *Lives* in the book-filled attic of my home. Reading the life of Theseus, I was much impressed by that passage telling of the great stone beneath which the boyish hero was to find his tokens of destiny whenever he should become old enough to lift its enormous weight. This legend had the effect of dispelling my keenest impatience to enter the vault, for it made me feel that the time was not yet ripe. Later, I told myself, I should grow to a strength and ingenuity which might enable me to unfasten the heavily chained door with ease; but until then I would do better by conforming to what seemed the will of Fate.

Accordingly my watches by the dank portal became less persistent, and much of my time was spent in other though equally strange pursuits. I would sometimes rise very quietly in the night, stealing out to walk in those churchyards and places of burial from which I had been kept by my parents. What I did there I may not say, for I am not now sure of the reality of certain things; but I know that on the day after such a nocturnal ramble I would often astonish those about me with my knowledge of topics almost forgotten for many generations. It was after a night like this that I shocked the community with a queer conceit about the burial of the rich and celebrated Squire Brewster, a maker of local history who was interred in 1711, and whose slate headstone, bearing a graven skull and crossbones, was slowly crumbling to powder. In a moment of childish imagination I vowed not only that the undertaker, Goodman Simpson, had stolen the silver-buckled shoes, silken hose, and satin small-clothes of the deceased before burial; but that the Squire himself, not fully inanimate, had turned

twice in his mound-covered coffin on the day after interment.

But the idea of entering the tomb never left my thoughts; being indeed stimulated by the unexpected genealogical discovery that my own maternal ancestry possessed at least a slight link with the supposedly extinct family of the Hydes. Last of my paternal race, I was likewise the last of this older and more mysterious line. I began to feel that the tomb was *mine*, and to look forward with hot eagerness to the time when I might pass within that stone door and down those slimy stone steps in the dark. I now formed the habit of listening very intently at the slightly open portal, choosing my favorite hours of midnight stillness for the odd vigil. By the time I came of age, I had made a small clearing in the thicket before the mold-stained façade of the hillside, allowing the surrounding vegetation to encircle and overhang the space like the walls and roof of a sylvan bower. This bower was my temple, the fastened door my shrine, and here I would lie outstretched on the mossy ground, thinking strange thoughts and dreaming strange dreams.

The night of the first revelation was a sultry one. I must have fallen asleep from fatigue, for it was with a distinct sense of awakening that I heard the voices. Of these tones and accents I hesitate to speak; of their quality I will not speak; but I may say that they presented certain uncanny differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and mode of utterance. Every shade of New England dialect, from the uncouth syllables of the Puritan colonists to the precise rhetoric of fifty years ago, seemed represented in that shadowy colloquy, though it was only later that I noticed the fact. At the time, indeed, my attention was distracted from this matter by another phenomenon; a phenomenon so fleeting that I could not take oath upon its reality. I barely fancied that as I awoke, a *light* had been hurriedly extinguished within the sunken sepulcher. I do not think I was either astounded or panic-stricken, but I know that I was greatly and permanently *changed* that night. Upon returning home I went with much directness to a rotting chest in the attic, wherein I found the key which next day unlocked with ease the barrier I had so long stormed in vain.

It was in the soft glow of late afternoon that I first entered the vault on the abandoned slope. A spell was upon me, and my heart leaped with an exultation I can but ill describe. As I closed the door behind me and descended the dripping steps by the light of my lone candle, I seemed to know the way; and though the candle sputtered with the stifling reek of the place, I felt singularly at home in the musty, charnel-house air. Looking about me, I beheld many marble slabs bearing coffins, or the remains of coffins. Some of these were sealed and intact, but others had nearly vanished, leaving the silver handles and plates isolated amidst certain curious heaps of whitish dust. Upon one plate I read the name of Sir Geoffrey Hyde, who had come from Sussex in 1640 and died here a few years later. In a conspicuous alcove was one fairly well preserved and untenanted casket, adorned with a single name which brought to me both a smile and a shudder. An odd impulse caused me to climb upon the broad slab, extinguish my candle, and lie down within the vacant box.

In the gray light of dawn I staggered from the vault and locked the chain of the door behind me. I was no longer a young man, though but twenty-one winters had chilled my bodily frame. Early-rising villagers who observed my homeward progress looked at me strangely, and marveled

at the signs of ribald revelry which they saw in one whose life was known to be sober and solitary. I did not appear before my parents till after a long and refreshing sleep.

Henceforward I haunted the tomb each night; seeing, hearing, and doing things I must never recall. My speech, always susceptible to environmental influences, was the first thing to succumb to the change; and my suddenly acquired archaism of diction was soon remarked upon. Later a queer boldness and recklessness came into my demeanor, till I unconsciously grew to possess the bearing of a man of the world despite my lifelong seclusion. My formerly silent tongue waxed voluble with the easy grace of a Chesterfield or the godless cynicism of a Rochester. I displayed a peculiar erudition utterly unlike the fantastic, monkish lore over which I had pored in youth; and covered the fly-leaves of my books with facile impromptu epigrams which brought up suggestions of Gay, Prior, and the sprightliest of the Augustan wits and rimesters. One morning at breakfast I came close to disaster by declaiming in palpably liquorish accents an effusion of Eighteenth Century bacchanalian mirth a bit of Georgian playfulness never recorded in a book, which ran something like this:

Come hither, my lads, with your tankards of ale,
And drink to the present before it shall fail;
Pile each on your platter a mountain of beef,
For 'tis eating and drinking that bring us relief:
So fill up your glass,
For life will soon pass;
When you're dead ye'll ne'er drink to your king or your lass!

Anacreon had a red nose, so they say;
But what's a red nose if ye're happy and gay?
Gad split me! I'd rather be red whilst I'm here,
Than white as a lily—and dead half a year!
So Betty, my miss,
Come give me a kiss;
In hell there's no innkeeper's daughter like this!

Young Harry, propp'd up just as straight as he's able,
Will soon lose his wig and slip under the table;
But fill up your goblets and pass 'em around—
Better under the table than under the ground!
So revel and chaff
As ye thirstily quaff:
Under six feet of dirt 'tis less easy to laugh!

The fiend strike me blue! I'm scarce able to walk,
And damn me if I can stand upright or talk!
Here, landlord, bid Betty to summon a chair;
I'll try home for a while, for my wife is not there!
So lend me a hand;
I'm not able to stand,
But I'm gay whilst I linger on top of the land!

About this time I conceived my present fear of fire and thunderstorms. Previously indifferent to such things, I had now an unspeakable horror of them; and would retire to the innermost recesses of the house whenever the heavens threatened an electrical display. A favorite haunt of mine during the day was the ruined cellar of the mansion that had burned down, and in fancy I would picture the structure as it had been in its prime. On one occasion I startled a villager by leading him confidently to a shallow sub-cellar, of whose existence I seemed to know in spite of the fact that it had been unseen and forgotten for many generations.

At last came that which I had long feared. My parents, alarmed at the altered manner and appearance of their only son, commenced to exert over my movements a kindly espionage which threatened to result in

disaster. I had told no one of my visits to the tomb, having guarded my secret purpose with religious zeal since childhood; but now I was forced to exercise care in threading the mazes of the wooded hollow, that I might throw off a possible pursuer. My key to the vault I kept suspended from a cord about my neck, its presence known only to me. I never carried out of the sepulcher any of the things I came upon whilst within its walls.

One morning as I emerged from the damp tomb and fastened the chain of the portal with none too steady hand, I beheld in an adjacent thicket the dreaded face of a watcher. Surely the end was near; for my bower was discovered, and the objective of my nocturnal journeys revealed. The man did not accost me, so I hastened home in an effort to overhear what he might report to my careworn father. Were my sojourns beyond the chained door about to be proclaimed to the world? Imagine my delighted astonishment on hearing the spy inform my parent in a cautious whisper *that I had spent the night in the bower outside the tomb;* my sleep-filmed eyes fixed upon the crevice where the padlocked portal stood ajar! By what miracle had the watcher been thus deluded? I was now convinced that a supernatural agency protected me. Made bold by this heaven-sent circumstance, I began to resume perfect openness in going to the vault; confident that no one could witness my entrance. For a week I tasted to the full the joys of that charnel conviviality which I must not describe, when the *thing* happened, and I was borne away to this accursed abode of sorrow and monotony.

I should not have ventured out that night; for the taint of thunder was in the clouds, and a hellish phosphorescence rose from the rank swamp at the bottom of the hollow. The call of the dead, too, was different. Instead of the hillside tomb, it was the charred cellar on the crest of the slope whose presiding demon beckoned to me with unseen fingers. As I emerged from an intervening grove upon the plain before the ruin, I beheld in the misty moonlight a thing I had always vaguely expected. The mansion, gone for a century, once more reared its stately height to the raptured vision; every window ablaze with the splendor of many candles. Up the long drive rolled the coaches of the Boston gentry, whilst on foot came a numerous assemblage of powdered exquisites from the neighboring mansions. With this throng I mingled, though I knew I belonged with the hosts rather than with the guests. Inside the hall were music, laughter, and wine on every hand. Several faces I recognized; though I should have known them better had they been shriveled or eaten away by death and decomposition. Amidst a wild and reckless throng I was the wildest and most abandoned. Gay blasphemy poured in torrents from my lips, and in my shocking sallies I heeded no law of God, man, or nature.

Suddenly a peal of thunder, resonant even above the din of the swinish revelry, clave the very roof and laid a hush of fear upon the boisterous company. Red tongues of flame and searing gusts of heat engulfed the house; and the roysterers, struck with terror at the descent of a calamity which seemed to transcend the bounds of unguided nature, fled shrieking into the night. I alone remained, riveted to my seat by a groveling fear which I had never felt before. And then a second horror took possession of my soul. Burnt alive to ashes, my body dispersed by the four winds, *I might never lie in the tomb of the Hydes!* Was not my coffin prepared for me? Had I not a right to rest till eternity amongst the descendants of Sir Geoffrey Hyde?

Aye! I would claim my heritage of death, even though my soul go seeking through the ages for another corporeal tenement to represent it on that vacant slab in the alcove of the vault. *Jervas Hyde* should never share the sad fate of Palinurus!

As the phantom of the burning house faded, I found myself screaming and struggling madly in the arms of two men, one of whom was the spy who had followed me to the tomb. Rain was pouring down in torrents, and upon the southern horizon were flashes of the lightning that had so lately passed over our heads. My father, his face lined with sorrow, stood by as I shouted my demands to be laid within the tomb; frequently admonishing my captors to treat me as gently as they could. A blackened circle on the floor of the ruined cellar told of a violent stroke from the heavens; and from this spot a group of curious villagers with lanterns were prying a small box of antique workmanship, which the thunderbolt had brought to light.

Ceasing my futile and now objectless writhing, I watched the spectators as they viewed the treasure-trove, and was permitted to share in their discoveries. The box, whose fastenings were broken by the stroke which had unearthed it, contained many papers and objects of value; but I had eyes for one thing alone. It was the porcelain miniature of a young man in a smartly curled bag-wig, and bore the initials "J. H." The face was such that as I gazed, I might well have been studying my mirror.

On the following day I was brought to this room with the barred windows, but I have been kept informed of certain things through an aged and simple-minded servitor, for whom I bore a fondness in infancy, and who, like me, loves the churchyard. What I have dared relate of my experiences within the vault has brought me only pitying smiles. My father, who visits me frequently, declares that at no time did I pass the chained portal, and swears that the rusted padlock had not been touched for fifty years when he examined it. He even says that all the village knew of my journeys to the tomb, and that I was often watched as I slept in the bower outside the grim façade, my half-open eyes fixed on the crevice that leads to the interior. Against these assertions I have no tangible proof to offer, since my key to the padlock was lost in the struggle on that night of horrors. The strange things of the past which I have learned during those nocturnal meetings with the dead he dismisses as the fruits of my lifelong and omnivorous browsing amongst the ancient volumes of the family library. Had it not been for my old servant Hiram, I should have by this time become quite convinced of my madness.

But Hiram, loyal to the last, has held faith in me, and has done that which impels me to make public at least a part of my story. A week ago he burst open the lock which chains the door of the tomb perpetually ajar, and descended with a lantern into the murky depths. On a slab in an alcove he found an old but empty coffin whose tarnished plate bears the single word: *Jervas.* In that coffin and in that vault they have promised me I shall be buried.

The DEVIL'S GRAVEYARD

by G. G. Pendarves

"There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, and bestial, uncouth forms surged forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire."

"YOU don't understand, John! I used to laugh at it, too, but these last months the thought of that old curse has been more and more in my mind."

"Well, dear, why worry yet? It will be time enough if this proves to be a boy; after all, we may have a daughter at last."

"No! I feel convinced it will be another boy, and the words of that old saying go round and round in my head:

"When Radcliffe's heir has brothers six
And seeks to take to wife
The only child of Blackmore's line,
The Curse shall wake to life."

"But, Agnes, you are really inventing worries. Supposing this seventh is a boy! According to the silly jingle you quoted, the worst will only happen about twenty years hence, if our eldest boy should happen to fall in love with Blackmore's small daughter. And after all, it's absurd," he went on. "She might have any number of brothers and sisters in the interval—or she might even die," he added hopefully.

"You may make light of it, and I know it sounds absurd; but I feel so afraid, so miserably afraid, as though some black shadow was by my side, always whispering and threatening."

"My dear," said Radcliffe, now genuinely alarmed, "You musn't let go like that! It's only a foolish old story, kept up by one generation after another. All old families boast of hidden treasures, or a curse, or a ghost, or something of that nature—it goes with the estate. You must not get fancies like that into your head, dear."

He got up and crossed the room to where his wife was sitting in the sunny window embrasure, and stood looking at her in a puzzled way, as though she were a new hybrid which had appeared among his treasured plants, and could not be accounted for. He was devoted to his wife, but hitherto she had been so normal and well-balanced that this strange fantastic notion of hers worried him considerably. It was so utterly unlike her.

"Better have Dr. Green up tomorrow and have a chat with him."

His wife suppressed a sigh. It was impossible to make him take her seriously. It was of no use to try to explain the awful weight that pressed upon her heart—the monstrous fear that oppressed her. He put it all down to her health, and brushed aside her premonitions as mere fancies.

But at the same time it comforted her that he should take this attitude. His unimaginative practical outlook on life, and careless way of disbelief-

ing what he did not understand, actually did, for the moment, make her feel that perhaps after all her fears were only imaginary.

She smiled at her husband in the sudden relief of her thought, as he bent down to kiss her and, drawing her wrap about her shoulders, said:

"It would do you good to have a turn round the grounds, Agnes. I'll take you down to the potting sheds. There are some new hybrids there that will surprize you. Perfect specimens! Even old Burns was almost enthusiastic about them; he never believed I could get that blue dahlia."

The stillness of a golden October evening enveloped the big room where so many generations of Radcliffes had first seen the light. Mrs. Radcliffe lay dying in that room now.

Her husband, bewildered and helpless, faced with the first great sorrow in a hitherto placid existence, stood over by one of the windows, staring out over the far-stretching acres of the Radcliffe estate.

The six elder sons had come and gone, she would see them no more; and on them, especially David, her first-born and dearest, the mother's thoughts were centered.

She glanced from time to time at the cot, where slept her seventh son. Who was he? What was he? Why did her whole being shrink from the tiny helpless thing? She had turned from him with loathing, when the nurse showed him to her first—how long ago was that? A day, or an hour? It was all a mist and confusion in her brain. But after that they had troubled her with him no more.

She looked again at the child. What was that dark shadow? Why did it move when everything else was still in that quiet room?

A little cloud resting on the cot. A vapor exhaling from the body of the child. Rapidly it darkened and spread, and soon loomed gigantic to the ceiling. Very slowly, almost imperceptibly, it took form and shape! Its vague outlines became sharp and definite, and presently something dimly approaching the semblance of a man towered there—a leering unholy thing! Its menacing bulk, shapeless and uncouth as one of the lesser animals in the far-off days of the primeval world! Its cold unsmiling eyes in dreadful contrast to the mouth distended in silent horrid laughter! Its bloated features a travesty of man even at his most vile!

The evil hour had dawned. This was the horror which had haunted her so long, this was the doom that would haunt her first-born!

She tried to call out—to move, and the pale eyes of that accursed thing gleamed evilly upon her efforts.

One last awful struggle with the icy numbness that pressed upon her limbs, and then the mother gave one great cry, pointing a shaking finger at the cot.

"The Curse! Kill—kill the child!"

John Radcliffe turned instantly; he saw nothing but the awful look on his wife's face as she fell back, and before he could reach her side she was gone—her heart had stopped in that supreme effort; and all unseen as Radcliffe stooped over the bed, that fell shadow moved about the silent room, and presently withdrew itself once more to the human habitation which sheltered it.

2

Far up among the heather which spread its rich carpet to the very verge of his own fields and parklands, David Radcliffe sat, and by his side the girl who had just promised to marry him.

They were both extremely happy. The sun seemed to be shining for their especial benefit, the deep glowing colors of sky and moor to be painted just as a background for their joy.

"There is nothing to wait for, Maisie dear," said the man. "Now that my father is dead I must live at The Turrets altogether, and curb my desire for travel and expeditions. But you must marry me soon—very soon! I can't face the great lonely old place for very long without you. There's only Hirst at home now, and I see as little of him as possible."

"I shall feel dreadful about leaving my poor old dad by himself, though," answered the girl. "I know he would never consent to come and live at Radcliffe Turrets with us; he would never have a happy moment away from all those old Blackmore ancestors who gloom down on us from the walls. You've no idea how I dislike some of them."

"I expect you will dislike some of mine even more," laughed David, as he turned to kiss the sunburnt cheek so near his own.

"Well, for sheer ugliness I think the Blackmores score; your family was really rather handsome. But, of course, that horrible portrait you boast of is worse than all mine put together."

"Oh, you mean the man who was nick-named 'Giles the Thruster,' because he fought so many duels. He had a rather sinister reputation, and his face matches it. It is a very famous portrait, though."

"I hate it," said Maisie with a little shiver. "That sneering mouth and those long narrow eyes. Oh, it's a wicked face!"

David put a protecting arm about her.

"Well, it's only a picture after all; he's dead, hundreds of years ago."

"Yes, and I am very glad too. That old legend of the Radcliffe Curse is about him, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered David. "He said he was coming back to haunt us. I'm the one he ought to haunt, too! The eldest of seven sons, and you are a Blackmore, and an only child."

"Oh, David, what a perfectly horrid idea! Are you really the one that is meant in the Curse?"

He replied laughingly, "Yes, I really am. But, of course, it's only a fairy tale."

"What was the whole story of the Curse, dear? Why did your ancestor curse anybody at all?"

"Well, if you will promise not to take it seriously, I will tell you. I read it in some old manuscripts I found once in a secret drawer. The story goes that in the Thirteenth Century there was, as now, a family of seven Radcliffe brothers, and the youngest was this Giles the Thruster. He was betrothed to a girl, the only daughter of a Blackmore, whose land adjoined ours then, as it does now.

"The eldest Radcliffe also loved this girl, and the two of them ran away together. Giles pursued them, caught them up on the road, and the two men fought a duel in which Giles, blind with fury, missed his stroke, and was fatally wounded, and died, and was buried there in the clearing by the roadside, where they had fought. In dying, he cursed his brother bitterly, and swore that he would come again to earth and take his revenge.

"He prophesied that history would repeat itself, and that in the future once more seven Radcliffe brothers should be born, and the eldest again desire to wed a Blackmore's only daughter. Giles vowed that then he would return to snatch the girl from that eldest born, and cheat him of his love as he himself had been cheated."

"Oh, David! How awful if such things really could happen!"

"Well, they can't. We don't live in the Dark Ages now, darling. I am afraid old Giles would have a rough time of it if he returned to England in these post-war days. Everything got killed in the war. Religion and superstition alike. People only be-

lieve in what can be seen and paid for now."

"Nonsense, David! — Of course they——"

She broke off and turned to look at him. He had let his arm drop from her shoulders, and was sitting up stiffly, his eyes fixed on something ahead.

"Why, what's the matter? What are you looking at, David?"

She caught his arm, her own rosy color fading as she saw his dreadful pallor and the stricken look in his eyes.

"David! David! Answer me. Oh, do speak! There's nothing there!"

She beat with her little hand on the man's clenched fist, but he neither moved nor answered her.

"Oh, you must be ill. What shall I do? Can't you speak to me—just a word, dear?"

But he sat in frozen silence, his face a mask of horror.

At last she got up and moved toward the spot on which David's eyes were fixed so intently. Suddenly the wide sweep of moors seemed desolate, almost menacing. A dark cloud blotted out the sunshine, and a little squall of wind rushed up angrily against her as she moved forward.

"Come back, Maisie. A—a—h—h! come back."

The voice rose almost to a scream, and she turned to see David plunging over the heather toward her. He seized her roughly by the arm and dragged her away, and then stood holding her, panting as though he had run a race.

The reaction of finding him apparently recovered made her irritable, and she said, "I'm not going to run away; you needn't clutch me like that. What on earth is the matter with you, David?"

The man did not answer, but clasped her to him, his lips moving silently. He did not heed her questions, but began to walk away rapidly, holding her hand in his, and urging her to greater haste.

Once or twice he pushed up against her, as though to avoid someone or something at his other side, his hand gripping hers convulsively.

Maisie was first frightened and then annoyed at his behavior. Why couldn't he explain? It was ridiculous—dragging her across the moors like this.

She wrenched her hand free at last, and said, "I can't go so quickly. Leave me, David; I would rather go home alone."

He turned a white face to her, as she stood looking up at him, her brown curls all blown about her pretty face, her gray eyes wide and indignant.

Her heart melted when she saw his look, and she said, "Oh, my dear, what is it? Do tell me. I can't bear to be treated like this. You look as though you had seen a ghost!"

Then as David recoiled, the horror on his face was reflected on her own, and she said, in a terrified whisper, "Oh, David, have you seen something? What was it? Tell me!"

The man's lips moved, but no sound was audible. Maisie clasped his arm.

"Was it really a ghost?" she whispered, with a horrified glance over her shoulder. "Oh, let us go then, quickly; it may come back; it's so lonely here."

For answer David put his hand to his throat with a sudden sharp intake of breath.

"Go away—go away," he managed to gasp out. She fell back a few paces, her frightened eyes glued to his face.

"But why won't you let me touch you? I want to be near you, David."

"No, no," he muttered. "Keep away. It's—it's—oh, Maisie, it's the Curse!"

At the last word he shivered like one in an ague, and backed away still farther from the girl, his outstretched

hands repelling something terrible and unseen.

She covered her face and stood trembling and shaking in every limb.

David stood looking at her miserably, then he sprang to her side and, taking her in his arms, said, "Kiss me good-bye, Maisie. Quick, ah, quick! Before he——"

But as the girl raised her face to his, David jerked back violently, with such abruptness that Maisie almost lost her balance.

"Go home—run—run, darling," came David's voice, low and urgent. "It's no use. We may not be together."

At that she turned, and ran obediently in the opposite direction, looking over her shoulder at intervals to see him walking away, his head bent, his whole figure shrunk together like that of an old man.

3

A WHOLE week went by, and still Maisie, beside herself with constant anxiety, saw and heard nothing of David.

The memory of his face with that gray shadow of fear upon it, and the agony of his eyes haunted her night and day. She had never known how dear he was to her until now, when this awful invisible agency had thrust them asunder.

Her heart was torn between the longing to see him and the fear of adding to his sufferings if she did so.

Every day she wandered aimlessly about the moors, seeking the high levels where she could command a view of the country round, and perhaps catch a glimpse of his tall figure.

When dark came, she kept watch from the window of her room, staring for hours in the direction of Radcliffe Turrets, where the many lighted windows shone; and she pictured David alone and wanting her. All night she would keep the vigil, with the feeling that so she might help him, that her love would protect him when night and its evil shadows closed in around him; and when dawn came she would fall into heavy sleep, troubled by many dreams in which she and David fled over land and sea, pursued by a monster which would not let her go.

Then one day she saw him! It was late afternoon when she came upon him, sitting on a rough boulder, apparently watching the sun sinking into a smoky gray cloud-bank, which like a forest of dreams rose on the western horizon.

"David!—Oh, at last, my dear!"

She ran eagerly toward him, and he rose at the sound of her clear voice, and made as if to meet her. But at the first step he fell back suddenly, clutching the rock behind him with one hand and holding the other arm before his face, as though to ward off some invisible opponent.

"Don't come near me, Maisie," his voice came in a choking cry.

The girl stood rooted, and a great nausea swept over her as she watched the unspeakable loathing on the man's face, the blind terror with which he resisted some unseen foe.

Instinct warned her that in some way her presence was harmful to David, that her nearness increased his danger and suffering—and she retreated until she saw that he no longer struggled with that hateful enemy, but was sitting on the rock with his head bowed on his hands.

There she left him, and stumbling, with tears blinding her eyes, she went slowly home.

The bitterness of despair filled her as she realized that she had actually been the cause of torturing David afresh. She must never see him again. She would write and tell him so tonight.

4

"HERE is a letter for you, David, I found it on the hall table and brought it as I happened to be coming up."

Hirst Radcliffe, the youngest of the Radcliffe sons, entered his brother's study as he spoke, and stood, a tall, arresting figure, his pale cold eyes gleaming as he noted the bowed shoulders and drawn features of the man in the chair by the fire.

"It looks like Maisie's writing. I have wondered why we have seen so little of her lately—perhaps this will explain."

Hirst crossed the room and stood leaning up against the fireplace. He held the letter carelessly, and as David stretched out an eager hand, with a sudden glow of color in his sunken cheek, Hirst slipped, stumbled, and in some way too quick for David to see, the letter fell into the heart of the flames and was destroyed in a moment.

"Oh, I say! How stupid of me! My dear chap, I am sorry. What a perfectly rotten accident."

There was a wild light in David's eyes as he sprang to his feet.

"You're not sorry! I believe you did it on purpose. Get out of my room. I loathe the sight of you."

"That's nothing new, is it? No one would ever accuse us of being a David and Jonathan! But it's no use letting your feelings run away with you like that."

"Will you or won't you get out?"

"Yes, when I am ready to go. I just came up to bring your letter, and tell you I thought of strolling over to see old Blackmore and Maisie."

David's fists clenched, and he made a spring forward, but a sudden blackness descended upon him, and from out its murk, that which he knew and dreaded began slowly to take form. He collapsed, suddenly limp and shaking, into the chair behind him, as with a sneering laugh Hirst sauntered out of the room, closing the door softly behind him.

For long David sat, staring hard at the fire, as if out of the flames themselves he could reconstruct the precious letter they had consumed.

At last he rose shakily to his feet and rang the bell.

"Send Reed to me, will you?" he asked the footman.

The valet appeared almost at once, an old servant of the Radcliffes, and devoted to David as he had been to his father before him.

"Reed, I have made up my mind to go away. I want you to pack for me at once, and also take a message to Miss Blackmore."

"Yes, Mr. David."

"I won't write the message. You must remember it, Reed—it's safer so. Tell her I am going to try to escape if I can! I am going to that little place in the Carpathians where I stayed once with a college chum. She knows where it is. Ask her to write and—give her my love, Reed."

The old man stood hesitating.

"Take me with you, sir," he burst out at last. "You must not go alone."

But David shook his head.

"No, no, Reed. You can do more for me by staying here at home. I think you know or guess something of what has fallen on me. I am cursed—a doomed man, Reed."

The faithful old servant nodded dumbly, and David continued, "Look after her for me. You and she are the only ones who know or understand. And now come, we must be quick; I want to start in a few hours."

5

MAISIE BLACKMORE was in the train on the way to London. It was some weeks, the darkest she had ever known, since David had fled from England. The faithful Reed had given his master's message and she had written again and again to him, and waited now in the greatest suspense for news. It was a few days only since the wonderful idea had dawned which had impelled her to take her present journey.

It was her father who had been the unconscious means of sending her on it. At breakfast one morning, he had looked up suddenly from his *Northern Mail*, saying, "Well, well. I am sorry to have missed that. If I had known I would have gone up to town to hear him."

Maisie was absorbed in her own thoughts, wondering if David would write, if he had escaped from the Curse, and if she would ever see him again—and she answered abstractedly, "Would you?"

Mr. Blackmore continued with increasing enthusiasm, "Of course. Old Fremling was the best chum a man ever had. I shall never forget those years at Oxford together. And apart from that, his lecture must have been well worth hearing."

The girl's listless interest was roused at the name of Fremling, and she asked, "What was he lecturing on, father?"

"Devil Worship and Ancient Rites among the Nomadic Tribes of Central Asia."

"I would like to have heard that, too," said Maisie, her eye kindling with an almost painful interest.

"Nonsense, child! Not at all the sort of thing for you. The tales Fremling tells make even me—well, if not afraid, something very like it. It's appalling to think such things exist, even in foreign countries. Of course I consider Fremling exaggerates a great deal. He's an extraordinary man—a genius!—and knows more about Asia than any man alive."

"I remember him very well, coming to stay here once, when I was a child," answered Maisie reflectively.

"Yes—about ten years ago," agreed her father. "He was very much interested in the strange illness of the vicar of this parish, who was said to be haunted."

Maisie's voice shook as she asked, "And what happened? What did Sir Donald Fremling do?"

Blackmore buttered his toast, and helped himself to marmalade before replying, "Well, I never pretended to understand Fremling or his fantastic theories. He did explain his view of this particular case, but I have forgotten."

"But the vicar! Did Sir Donald save him?"

"There was no question of saving," said her father testily. "The vicar was mad—and he got better. Fremling helped in one way, soothing influence and all that, no doubt. But as to casting out devils—well it's not the sort of thing that happens to a decent Englishman. All very well for the colored races, with their hot climate, and priests, and opium."

And with this final statement the old man had risen from the table and gone out into the garden.

Maisie had swiftly made her decision; and accepting a long-standing invitation from a friend who lived in London, she left home two days later, determined to see Sir Donald Fremling and tell him the whole story of the Curse.

Sir Donald Fremling! The name rose up now in Maisie's mind, as a harbor light to a storm-tossed mariner. Could he really cast out devils? Would he be able to save David?

6

These two questions still burned in her mind as, on the following afternoon, she reached Sir Donald's house. He was sitting alone by his study fire, with a Great Dane stretched by his side, and an old worn book in black letter on a small table at his elbow.

He showed no surprize at her visit, and greeted her with a gentle Old World courtesy which gave her courage. She sank into a chair on the opposite side of the fire. The dog looked at her solemnly, then stalked over and put one heavy paw on her knee.

"You see you are among friends,"

Sir Donald said with a smile in his deep-set eyes, as they met the hesitating doubt in her own. "You can speak freely! Tell me why you are here, in London, instead of enjoying your moors and heather at home? You don't look as though the city agreed with you, either. Why are you so unhappy, dear child?"

"Oh, I am—I am most unhappy," said the girl, clasping her hands with painful earnestness. "It's too awful. It's not the sort of thing that *can* happen, really. I feel you can't possibly believe it."

"There's very little I can not believe," answered the old savant gravely. "Tell me everything, and let me judge for myself. Remember I have spent my whole life in warring against those dark forces which are all about us, and which manifest themselves so terribly at times."

Thus encouraged, Maisie told him all she knew, first of the legend of the Curse—and of its subsequent fulfilment in the haunting of David Radcliffe.

Sir Ronald heard her without comment or interruption, and when she had finished he sat gazing thoughtfully at the Persian rug under his feet, his deep-set eyes almost hidden under his white eyebrows, his thin face showing many a line furrowed by past ordeals and encounters with Evil.

"Tell me all you can about the present Radcliffe family," Sir Donald asked presently.

"Well, as I said, David has six brothers, and they are all particularly nice jolly boys, except Hirst—the youngest?"

"Ah! The youngest! And why is he so different?"

"It is difficult to explain what he is like. But I hate him, and so does David. In fact, none of the brothers got on with him, and as soon as they were old enough they left home rather than live with him. It's been a very unhappy household since their mother died. The father loved Hirst best, and could see no fault in him; he sacrificed all the rest of the family to his caprices and wishes."

"This is most valuable information," Sir Donald said, his keen eyes alight with interest. "Go on, tell me all you can remember about this youngest Radcliffe."

"He was the strangest child. Even as a baby no one ever knew him to cry or shed a tear. He has never had one hour's pain or illness in his life, and is absolutely callous to everyone else's suffering. In fact, I am sure he enjoys the sight of pain. He is a horrible man—cold, sneering and hateful."

"How did the other boys treat him at school?"

"Oh, no school kept him more than a few days. There were dreadful scandals about it. He had a tutor finally—a Mr. Fane. And that was the worst of all."

"What happened to the tutor?"

"No one knows exactly—that's the horrible part of it. He got to look wretchedly ill and miserable while he was at The Turrets. David once begged him not to stay, because it made him feel so angry to see how Hirst treated him."

"And why didn't Fane go away then?"

"He told David he couldn't go—he would give no reason, simply said he couldn't go. Then he disappeared, and they found his body later, lying in the woods among the bracken and dead leaves. The doctor said he had died of shock, and his face was terrible to see, I believe."

"And was Hirst held to blame for the tragedy?"

"Well, no! Not exactly. And yet everyone who knew Hirst well, and had seen Fane with him, felt uneasy. The poor man had so obviously been in his power, and cringed before him in a most painful way."

"And is this Hirst Radcliffe living at home now?"

"Yes," answered Maisie. "He rarely leaves The Turrets; he has a suite to himself, and is supposed to be studying astronomy. He's got telescopes and all sorts of apparatus fixed up on a flat roof, very strange instruments some of them look, but I have only seen them from a distance."

After a few more questions Sir Donald said, "It's well for David Radcliffe that you came to me. He will not find a place of escape in Europe, or on any spot on earth until the Curse is broken and its power destroyed. Will you give me his address? I will go in search of him and bring him home. The Curse must be undone where it was first uttered, and David must help me to find that place."

Maisie rose, her white face raised imploringly to Sir Donald's.

"And do you think there is any hope of helping David?"

"Yes, my child," Sir Donald said, putting a hand on her shoulder. "There is always hope, and you have done much to help him already by coming here. In the meantime stay in London, do not return north. You must not see David again until he is a free man once more. Another meeting between you would mean danger to you both in the highest degree. And as to Hirst—I will explain more fully later, but if you value your immortal soul keep away from him. He is not what he seems."

7

DAVID RADCLIFFE stopped walking and stared around him. He realized suddenly that for the last few minutes that long-drawn-out sound had persistently forced itself upon his consciousness, but, absorbed in his own despairing thoughts, he had paid no heed to its appeal.

The broad highway over the Carpathian Alps stretched out before him, flinging its endless leagues about the shoulders of the mountains that towered in proud desolation to the wintry sky.

David stood for a minute, trying to penetrate the gloom of the dense fir-forests that marched on either hand; then, guided by that repeated cry, he turned off the road and plunged in among the trees. It was some minutes before he could locate the call accurately, but at last on the edge of a clearing he saw that an old man was there on the ground, leaning up against a tree and evidently in pain.

The stranger explained to David that he had walked out from Borviz, a small mountain hamlet about three miles distant, but had unfortunately slipped and wrenched his ankle, and found himself unable to walk or even stand.

Radcliffe, a great fair giant well over six feet, looked down on the slight figure of the injured man with considerable interest and sympathy; and for the first time in many weeks he felt the burden of his thoughts lifted, and an unwonted sense of security enveloped him.

"There's only one thing for it, I think, sir—I must carry you, if you will trust yourself to me."

The other man smiled up at this modern Sir Christopher.

"I think that would be imposing a little too far on your goodness, I am heavier than I look. But if you could find some conveyance and bring it here to me——"

Radcliffe shook his head.

"No! That would not do at all. These woods are far from safe even in the daylight, and it is already dusk! Night would have fallen long before I could get one of those rascally Tsziganes back here with a horse and cart. It is not safe for you to be here alone. Better let me carry you."

The older man looked up at his companion.

"Perhaps if you took me down to the road, someone might pass and give me a lift."

"I don't think there is any chance of that. Won't you let me try to lift you? We ought to start at once, there is a big fall of snow just about due."

As he spoke David knelt and hoisted the stranger on to his broad shoulders, and began to make his way slowly through the increasing darkness to the open road.

But there he halted. The snowstorm had arrived! And a stinging icy wind blew a flurry of sleet against his face as he emerged from the shelter of the forest.

"You can't do it in this. Better set me down again in the shelter of the trees, and make your way to the nearest village," said the stranger.

David answered with quick indignant warmth, "You don't know what a night, or even a few hours, means in these heights at this time of the year, sir. You would die of the cold, even apart from the danger of wolves. No! the only thing is to make a night of it together. I will build a fire, and find some sort of a shelter."

And in spite of protests, David carried his burden back to the woods, and having found a spot comparatively sheltered from the fury of the ever-rising storm, he proceeded to break off the lower branches of the fir trees, and soon made an effectual screen from the wind.

A fire was quickly built, and its cheerful crackle and the fragrant odor of the resinous wood drew a sigh of satisfaction from the man by whom Radcliffe now seated himself.

"You are showing great kindness to an absolute stranger—I owe my life to you," said the former, as he looked earnestly at his young benefactor, noting the hunted expression of the blue eyes, the marks of pain and fear on the young face.

David's color deepened as he made an awkward gesture of denial.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am of the accident that has brought us together," continued the old man. "I have come to this part of the world for the purpose of finding you."

"Finding me!" echoed David. "But I don't quite understand, I am afraid. Perhaps your name——?"

"My name is Fremling," answered the other.

"What! Not Sir Donald Fremling the famous traveler?"

Fremling smiled at the young man's enthusiasm.

"Yes, I suppose that describes me."

David put out his big brown hand and clasped that of the older man.

"I can't tell you how awfully glad I am to meet you, sir. It was only the other day I came across some friends of yours in Budapest. They were talking about what you had done for them, and all the strange places and people you had known."

David paused; then, encouraged by the listening attitude of his companion, he continued, rather hurriedly, "Is it true that you are interested in the supernatural, and—well, in what is called Black Magic?"

Fremling's face became very grave as he answered slowly, "Tell me what it is that haunts you."

"Haunts me!" gasped David. "But I did not say—I don't know why you think——?"

He suddenly turned and faced the other man, staring hard into Fremling's deep-set eyes.

"I am haunted! No man was ever haunted as I am. Do you believe in the power of a Curse?"

"I believe in the power of the hate which prompts a Curse," answered Fremling quietly.

Still David looked long and eagerly into the other's tranquil face; then, as if he had found what he sought and was satisfied, he turned away.

"It is not necessary for me to say that I am David Radcliffe," he said

at length. "Evidently you know who I am, and why I am here."

"Yes, I know everything. I have seen Maisie Blackmore—in fact she came to see me, and it was from her that I learned the danger you are in. I am an old friend of her father's, and remembering that I am interested in all supernatural manifestations she brought your case to me."

David flushed with pride and pleasure in this new proof of Maisie's love and ceaseless efforts to help him.

Sir Donald smiled.

"You are very young still in spite of your trouble. A girl whose spirit is so finely tempered as that of Maisie Blackmore, when she loves, loves without counting the cost at all—she would become the haunted one herself if by so doing she could free you from your Curse!'

"And what is your opinion, Sir Donald, now that you know all? What is it that haunts me—and why?"

"My opinion is that you have lived all your life with a demon at your side—your brother Hirst! He is not a human being, as we understand the term. His body is a vehicle borrowed by an Elemental. Your ancestor Giles died in a moment of eternal hate! And after death his strong personality was still bound to earth by its own overwhelming passions. Consequently it would ally itself with those Elemental forces of evil which strive unceasingly to gain access to mankind. Thus Giles has acquired force to project his hate down the centuries; and by infernal aid has at last gained possession of a body so that he may live on earth again."

David tossed a branch on to the fire, adding more and more fuel, until the crackling hiss of the flames almost drowned the moan of the wind, and the encroaching shadows of the forest fell back reluctantly.

Fremling noted the furtive glance the young man threw over his shoulder, and the nervous dilation of his nostrils.

"Tell me," begged David at last, "this—this *thing* that haunts me . . . can you destroy it . . . can you lift the Curse? Oh, I can not bear more."

"Poor boy!" said the older man. "All alone here in the wilderness with *that* ever at your side. I can realize what you must suffer."

At the compassion and understanding in Fremling's voice, the other looked up with tears in his eyes.

"I am going mad. I meant to end it all tonight. To walk on and on into the very heart of the storm, until the cold and snow had frozen the life out of me and I could never wait or fear or suffer any more."

"Only to find your implacable enemy awaiting you on the other side of the door you would thus force open."

"What do you say? No . . . Oh, no! I can't believe that."

"Won't believe it, you mean," corrected Fremling. "I do not wonder that you are eager to meet death—that you long for its merciful oblivion! But believe me when I tell you that there is no such easy way out of it as that. Should your enemy overcome you while you still possess your human body, his hate would cause your death . . . the death of your body, that is! But that would be the end, for in the effort he put forth to kill you, his power would expend itself, and your true self would henceforth continue freed from his malice.

"But on the other hand—should you cut short your span of human life yourself, Giles would meet you as an equal; you would have descended to his level, have pulled down the barriers between . . . and his hate would absorb your very being into his, and add incalculably to the diabolical force which gives him existence."

David leant forward in terrible agitation, and spoke rapidly, "Are you a devil, too? Has he sent you to taunt me—to drive me to greater de-

spair? You have taken away my only hope. Death was my one refuge."

His blue eyes glared at Fremling as he spoke, and it was only too evident that his reason was tottering to a fall.

With all the compassion of a father for a frightened child, Fremling clasped the hand of the unhappy man and answered gently, "I will help you. That is what I am here for. If you have courage and will to obey me, you may yet be saved. I can promise nothing, because so much depends on your own efforts and strength of purpose—but I have saved others in more desperate case even than yourself."

David's brief moment of madness passed, leaving him deeply contrite and ashamed of his outburst, and as the two men sat talking together hour after hour, David felt a spring of hope and confidence well up within him. His former passive acceptance of his awful fate changed to a strong determination to fight the evil which shadowed his existence. And when dawn came at last and the storm died, the quiet stillness of the mountains was reflected in his own heart as he rose to tread out the red fire and prepared to carry Fremling to some place of shelter and safety.

8

Over the jagged spine of rock which crested the hill known as the "Devil's Teeth," in that neighborhood—the great reddened orb of a harvest moon rose like the eye of some gigantic Polyphemus peering down on that unhallowed spot with wide unblinking stare, eager to witness once again the triumph of deathless hate—to gloat with full-orbed vision on the resurrection of all that was evil and abominable.

Fremling and Radcliffe stood watching the rising of this ill-omened moon, the younger man with beating heart and a feeling of helpless terror which made his hands and feet icy cold, and the breath come short and quick through his nostrils. His nervous excitement was in strong contrast to the calm of his companion, who looked alternately from his watch to the heavy shadow cast by the hill—a shadow retreating gradually like some furtive guilty thing back into the bulk of the hill which had cast it forth.

Fremling drew from his pocket a roll of parchment yellow with age, and consulted it narrowly.

"In half an hour's time, according to this manuscript," he said, "the outline of the grave should be distinct, and we shall learn the exact spot where Giles' blood was shed. It is there that we must meet the demon-soul which possesses your brother's body—and it is there alone that we can destroy it."

A long shudder shook David's body as he looked furtively round at the trees which encircled the open grassy space on which they stood. He watched the inky shadow of the hill, until its sharp outline became hazy and indistinct and the whole scene swam in a pale mist before his aching eyes. For a moment he shut them to recall Maisie's face—to nerve himself by the thought of her love and belief in him to face what was coming.

"Ah—h—h"—the low exclamation from Fremling made his heart stop beating; then his pulses throbbed furiously as he followed the direction of the other's pointing finger.

A luminous red stain, its shape unmistakable and sinister, was growing momentarily more distinct there on the grass in front of them . . . not six feet distant! Every leaf and blade of grass or weed within that rectangular boundary gleamed red as blood and fiery bright.

Sir Donald picked up from the ground a short, broad-bladed sword, worn and stained, its hilt encrusted with rubies whose fire outshone even the crimson glare of the grave itself.

"Dig . . . dig swiftly," he com-

manded, putting the weapon in the young man's hands. "Do not lose a moment—all depends now on your speed—before midnight that grave must lie open to the moon and stars, or we shall meet Giles unprepared and helpless."

Urged and goaded by repeated warnings, David pursued his dreadful task. The red grass came up easily enough, being rooted in a light powdered soil of the same deep red stain as the grass itself.

As the last sod of that stained weed was cut up and tossed aside, Fremling drew David quickly back from the graveside, and as he did so a great tremor shook the whole place, and a tongue of fire shot with a hissing roar skyward from the uncovered grave.

When it died Fremling went forward and peered cautiously into the grave, beckoning David to his side.

Clutching the older man with icy hands, the other looked, and drew back with a gasp . . . a dark shaft had opened, reaching to unfathomable depths, in whose yawning chasm a far-off point of green light burned like an evil star of the underworld.

David recoiled with ashen face, while Sir Donald's firm mouth set in its sternest lines.

"It is Gaffarel! Gaffarel the Mighty! Gaffarel and the Four Ancient Ones who come against us," he whispered to his trembling companion. "This place is saturated with unspeakable guilt."

His eyes closed for a minute as he muttered a few low indistinct words. Then taking from his pocket a small phial he turned to David again, and with a certain rare and fragrant oil he rapidly anointed the eyes, nose, and mouth of his companion and himself.

"I warn you," Fremling said, "to wait in silence now for what shall come. Do not utter a syllable, or you will plunge us both into that devil's tomb where Giles and his legions await us."

Chill eddies of wind swept up against the silent pair as the midnight hour approached . . . the ground under their feet trembled with the thundering march of some invisible army . . . the sound of countless hoarse voices and echoing horrid laughter came faintly to their ears.

Fremling drew forth a rod of ancient ivory, carved with symbols of magic as old as the dawn of the world. Its tip gleamed with pale fire, and as Sir Donald traced on the ground the outline of the sacred pentacle, the rank grass burned fiercely in its wake, and within the fiery five-pointed star David and Fremling stood by the graveside waiting.

Strange flickering lights moved among the trees which hemmed them in. Shadows formed and re-formed in sinister array about them.

The chill of death gripped David's heart, and he turned to look at his companion, standing upright and stedfast, his face raised to the midnight sky, his lips moving rapidly.

Suddenly all noise and movement ceased abruptly, and in the intense stillness which fell, David nerved himself for the last supreme effort. To face Giles the Thruster—to defy him—to pit his own will against the awful power of the demon.

It was coming—coming! In every nerve he felt the dread approach of the Enemy. With cold lips he murmured over to himself the ancient words of power which Fremling had taught him, and with shaking fingers pressed a leaf of vervain to his nostrils.

There upon the open grave stood Giles, a gigantic shadow, his beckoning figure drawing David with irresistible lure.

Like one in a trance, David took a stiff step forward, but ere he could move again, Fremling advanced swiftly and interposed his own body

between the monstrous Shadow and its victim.

At this, the baleful lights outside the pentacle drew closer, and dim forms were visible, bestial and uncouth, surging forward with horrid effort to pass the barrier of fire.

Fremling stood as though carved in stone; not a step did he give back, as with almost imperceptible movement Giles advanced upon him. There was not a hand's breadth between them, when Fremling held up the fire-tipped rod, and in a loud clear voice commanded Giles to return to the place whence he came. Three times Sir Donald repeated the terrible name which can command even the Ancient Four themselves, and slowly Giles the Thruster retreated—his hate powerless against the divine courage of his antagonist.

Inch by inch Sir Donald advanced—inch by inch Giles moved backward to the grave.

Sir Donald's face was awful in its set intensity, his steady eyes fixed on the flaming eyeballs of the demon who opposed him.

Good and Evil matched in a colossal struggle for supremacy.

Back over the brink of the grave Giles was forced, and then with the swiftness of light Fremling raised the magic rod and plunged its blazing tip deep into the Thruster's heart.

A great tongue of flame shot up from the fathomless depths of the grave, wrapping round Giles like a winding sheet of fire!

And in that same moment the phantom lights that pressed about the pentacle vanished utterly—the blazing star itself dimmed, and went out.

David gripped his companion's arm convulsively as they waited.

The black clouds overhead were torn by a blinding glare, followed by crash after crash of thunder, which seemed to shake the solid earth.

Then came the rain, sudden and torrential—washing the evil of the haunted spot from off the earth, and Fremling and Radcliffe lifted their faces thankfully to its cleasning sweetness.

At last it ceased, the darkness lifted, and from a ragged fringe of cloud the moon shone clear and bright. Grass and trees glistened with the silvery sparkle of some enchanted forest.

How strangely altered was that sullen ring of trees! That ragged, haunted, desolate spot!

Not haunted now—quiet and lonely, perhaps, but not desolate.

A calm sweet peace brooded over the place; the threatening copse had become a friendly shelter from the storm, where the birds cowered and shook their wings, piping encouragement to one another as they dried their wet feathers.

The circle of grass was wholly green. No red stain now, nor gaping depth was there. Green and fragrant the weeds and long waving grasses shone in the moonlight.

But that which had walked among men as Hirst, the youngest of the Radcliffe brothers, would haunt them no more.

Cold and terrible in death they found the mortal body deserted by its demon!

It faced them as they burst open the locked door of the study—sitting upright in a high carved chair—one hand clenched over its heart—the features twisted by inhuman rage.

The pale cold eyes were hardly changed by death, and stared into the horror-stricken faces around—and stared—and stared.

The MALIGNANT PEARL

by Thomas H. Griffiths

"Before he had a chance to use the weapon again, Luner's baton cracked on his head."

VERY few people know that the Countess of Clamnel, the English society beauty, once had a startling experience which almost caused her death. At the time, the society and general newspapers merely chronicled the fact of her illness, they never got the inside history of her mysterious malady.

By a peculiar coincidence, two men whom I know, met in the Cosmopolitan Club, Hamilton, Bermuda. And each had the fragment of a story, which pieced together, gave a clue to the weird experience that nearly caused the death of the beautiful countess.

Randolph Vince, a smart, clean-cut American in the early thirties, knew one-half the uncanny story. Harry Bruce, assistant chief in the Bermuda police force, knew the other part of it.

That Ranny Vince should be familiar with the phenomenon that happened to the countess did not in the least surprize me. His business (he was attached to one of the departments at Washington, D. C.) took him to many strange places in this world. And Ranny could, whenever he cared to, tell some remarkable true tales, which he invariably described as "little incidents in my career." One of the "little incidents" was revealed in the story of the malignant pearl.

It was Bruce who started the conversation about gems, and pearls in particular. As we sat in the smoking room at the club, chatting, he produced a Bermuda pearl which he gave to Ranny for inspection. Vince examined the gem, then he remarked: "That is a peculiar feature of the Bermuda pearl, they all have a yellowish tinge, though I did see one once that was black. It must have been a freak. And I never want to see another one like it."

"I, too," said Bruce, "know of one black Bermuda pearl. In fact, I had the pleasure of handling it before Sir

Henry Klane, who was once a governor here, bought it and took it to England. But, between ourselves, Vince, I wouldn't have accepted the pearl as a gift. There was *obeah* on it."

"*Obeah?*" I interrupted. "What's *obeah?*"

"West Indian witchcraft," Bruce told me.

"What shape was the pearl?" asked Ranny.

"Irregular, pear-shaped," replied Bruce.

"The same gem," said Vince. "I am positive, the same black pearl that nearly killed the Countess of Clamnel. I recollect being told she had got it from someone who had brought it from Bermuda. And there was an evil spell on the gem, eh?"

"Yes," said Bruce, "and West Indian witchcraft is bad stuff. No white man can understand it."

"I believe you," said Ranny. "I saw what the pearl did to the Countess of Clamnel, and it was decidedly uncanny. Indeed, in all my travels I never saw anything to equal it for weirdness. I'll tell you what happened."

For obvious reasons, the names mentioned in this narrative are fictitious. But the other facts are as written in this chronicle.

RANDOLPH VINCE'S STORY

In the fall of last year [Vince commenced] I was sent to England on special business. Just before I left New York, I wrote to the Duke of Warne, telling him when I was due to arrive in England.

The duke and I had met in Washington, and we had become quite intimate. He had made me promise that whenever I visited England, I would stay with him at his country residence.

Ultimately I reached my destination, and at the Revelle Hotel, London, where I usually stayed, I found a letter awaiting me from the duke. In a very cordial manner he renewed his invitation. I decided to accept his offer as soon as I had finished my business. A few days later I was comfortably settled at Langton Hall as one of the Duke of Warne's many guests.

The day after I arrived was the commencement of the Worcester County social season. Arrangements had been made to hold the annual ball of the County Hunt Club in the ballroom at Langton Hall. As a guest of the Duke of Warne, and as a matter of courtesy, I was invited to attend the premier social event of the season.

The function was a remarkably brilliant one. Distinguished men in naval and military uniforms, beautiful women handsomely garbed, made an assemblage remarkable for its variety and brilliance. The jewels displayed by the elegant, graceful women sparkled and glittered, while the red and blue uniforms worn by the men, adorned as many of them were by medals and orders, created a magnificent scene as the color and glitter mingled in the ballroom.

I stood at one side of the room and admired the gay dancers as they circled past me. One pair were especially noteworthy, and my eyes followed their movements as they swirled around the room. Young Lord Danley, tall, handsome and dark, was waltzing with the beautiful Countess of Clamnel. And the exquisite loveliness of the consort of the Earl of Clamnel was distinctive, even in that gathering of beautiful women. Chatting and laughing, the handsome pair again passed by where I stood. It was then I noticed, as it seemed to me, a spot of blood on the white bosom of the countess. For a moment I was startled by the strange resemblance. Then I smiled, as I realized that the seeming spot of blood could

not be anything other than a dark-colored jewel attached as a pendant to her pearl necklace.

The Duchess of Warne approached me. Banteringly she said, "You American men are like the men of other nationalities!"

"Why, Your Grace?" I asked, surprized.

The duchess laughed, a charming laugh in which I detected roguishness. "You are fond of pretty women," said she, adding, "I saw you admiring Lucille. Do you dance with her this evening?"

"Yes, I anticipate the pleasure," I replied. Then I ventured a question. I knew the information I desired bordered on the personal, but I was so intimate with the duke and duchess that I was sure my inquisitiveness would not seem impertinent to Her Grace.

"Have you noticed the pendant gem on the necklace of the Countess of Clamnel, how similar it seems to a spot of blood, Your Grace?"

"No," she said, "I have not. But now you point it out, Mr. Vince, I must admit there is a marked similarity. The gem is a pear-shaped black pearl brought from Bermuda. Lucille added it to her necklace to effect a contrast. She has a penchant for *outré* color schemes."

"The bizarre contrast is most becoming to the countess," I commented. The duchess smiled, then after a moment or two of desultory conversation she left me. I glanced at my program. One more dance, then I would have the delightful pleasure of waltzing with the Countess of Clamnel.

The musicians were tuning their instruments as I approached the countess. Charmingly she greeted me, remarking with a smile, "I thought you had forgotten me, Mr. Vince."

"Impossible," I replied, as the orchestra commenced to play a delightfully dreamy Hungarian waltz tune. A moment, and we were in the midst of the entrancing dance steps. The countess danced with the lissomeness and gracefulness which supposition claims as a fairy gift. As we lightly glided around the ballroom, conversing on many topics, my eyes involuntarily glanced at the black pearl. The countess noticed my glance. "Are you admiring my Bermuda pearl, Mr. Vince?"

"Yes," I said, somewhat abashed at having been caught staring at the gem, an action which she might have construed as that of an ill-bred person. But I felt reassured when she said: "A beauty, isn't it? I am wearing it for the first time."

"It is a magnificent gem, Your Ladyship," I agreed. And for a while nothing more was said about the pearl.

The deliciousness of my lovely companion so enchanted me, that even the ordinary polite conversation seemed frivolous. In perfect accord we glided over the floor to the entrancing harmony of the languorous Hungarian music. The atmosphere, redolent with the perfume of violets, seemed sensuous, and my usually prosaic imagination became charged with a fancy absurdly foreign to my nature. I imagined my exquisite companion and I were dancing on the clouds toward an unknown paradise.

Suddenly the idealistic fancy was dispelled, as with dilated nostrils I realized that the aroma of the violets had been replaced by an acrid odor. Momentarily my sense of smell could not analyze the scent. Then I shuddered, as my perceptive faculty recognized the odor. It was that of burnt flesh.

While I was wondering, seeking for a cause of the strange smell, the countess startled me by her peculiar actions. I felt her hand, which was resting on my arm, grip me as if her

fingers had been twitched by a spasm of pain. Her footsteps faltered, then she tripped and nearly fell. In a moment, with my aid she recovered her balance. We stopped dancing, and as I supported her I became aware that there was something radically wrong with the Countess of Clamnel.

"Your pardon, Mr. Vince," she said in a tremulous voice. "Would you please escort me to the reception room. I feel strangely indisposed."

"Anything to assist Your Ladyship," I said, distressed by the expression of pain on her lovely face. Her features were drawn, and her eyes reflected anguish. Without doubt, the countess was enduring intense pain; and it was caused by more than mere fatigue.

We passed from the ballroom into the deserted reception room, where I assisted her to a lounge. "Shall I get water for Your Ladyship?" I asked, distressed at the sight of her pallid face.

"No," she said, faintly. "The necklace! Take off the necklace!"

Her fingers fumbled with the clasp at the back of her neck, but she seemed unable to release the fastening.

"Permit me," I said. As I was about to lean over to undo the clasp, I suddenly stopped, for a whiff of the pungent smell of burnt flesh again reached my nostrils. Then, what must have been a diabolical instinct directed my gaze at the black pearl. Mentally I am strong, but what I saw almost caused me to shout with horror. The pearl was no longer black. It had changed to a dull red color, and as I stared at it fascinated, it shimmered and glowed like a red-hot spark on the white bosom of the countess. In the grip of a spell, I stood and stared at the gem. No smoke was perceptible; there was no indication of anything burning; nor could I hear the sizzle of flesh in contact with the glowing pearl. The phenomenon was absolutely inexplicable to me.

An agonizing cry from Her Ladyship startled me into action.

"Take it off!" she cried. Quickly I unloosed the fastening, and then I began to draw the necklace from around her neck. It came easily enough, all except the black pearl pendant. The malignant gem stuck to her flesh. With a jerk, I wrenched it out of the hole where it had embedded itself on her bosom, and as I pulled away the pearl, she moaned, then fainted.

Stupidly, for my senses were dazed, I stared at the gem in my hand. Its appearance now was normal, the fire glow had completely vanished. There was nothing to show that it had been any other color than black. Yet on the white flesh of the countess I could see the vivid burn, black and misshapen like the pearl. Mystified, I seemed unable to do anything other than stand and stare at the horrible disfigurement.

A movement by the countess aroused me out of my contemplative mood; her body twitched convulsively, and again she moaned. Carrying the necklace in my hand I hurried out of the room to get assistance. Outside the door of the reception room, I fortunately found a footman, and I sent him to find the Duchess of Warne and the Earl of Clamnel, saying that the countess was seriously ill.

A few minutes later they entered the room, and with them came Sir Harley David, the eminent surgeon, who at the time was also a guest of the Duke of Warne. Rapidly I told them of the malignant action of the black pearl.

"Incredible, Mr. Vince!" exclaimed the duchess, horrified.

"It may sound so, Your Grace. But look at the burn. That is corroboration enough."

"Vince is right," said the surgeon

as he examined the hole in the flesh of the countess. "Lucille has somehow received a terrible burn."

Hours later, the Countess of Clamnel regained consciousness, but only for a few minutes. For days she lay delirious, constantly raving about the pearl that was burning its way to her heart. A month elapsed before Her Ladyship recovered from the shock.

Later, I heard she had gone for a cruise in the Mediterranean. And I also heard that the Earl of Clamnel had removed the malignant black pearl from the necklace, sewed it in a small bag with a weight, and then dropped it somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea. And that was the end of the virulent black Bermuda pearl.

THE KEY STORY OF HARRY BRUCE

A SUITABLE end [commented Bruce]. Yes, a very fitting end. From the sea it came, to the sea it returned. Its destructive propensity is finished. I am glad. I know, Vince, there was *obi* or *obeah* (whichever word you like, they both mean the same), on the black pearl. So I'm happy to know the devilish gem has been put where it can not harm another human being. But I'll tell you the evil history of the pearl and how I came in contact with it. Then you will understand how the Countess of Clamnel became an innocent victim of a malignant spell. She was very fortunate; some of the people who handled the pearl died—violent deaths.

A mulatto named Shansun found the pearl. Shansun was the servant of Ferguson, a white fisherman, and the two of them lived alone on Agar's Island. One of the mulatto's duties was the collecting of bait, and out of an oyster gathered for that purpose came the black pearl.

One day the mulatto brought a pail full of oysters into the house, and among the lot there was one with a peculiar humpbacked shell. He picked it out of the pail and gave it to Ferguson, pointing out the peculiarity in the shape of the shell. Ferguson opened it and found a splendid black pearl. Now among the colored people a superstition is rife that to find and possess a black pearl will bring them good luck and happiness. Naturally, when Shansun saw the pearl he demanded it from the white man. Ferguson obstinately refused to return it, for he recognized its cash —not sentimental—value. Abusive words led to blows, and utimately the white man and the mulatto fought for possession of the black pearl. Shansun was badly beaten, and with the beating he professed to renounce his claim to the gem.

The same afternoon, Ferguson and Shansun rowed in a skiff to Hamilton. The white man had the pearl, and he intended to sell it to Jan Van Dorp, an old Dutchman who dealt in pearls and native curios. Leaving the mulatto in charge of the boat, Ferguson went to the house of the dealer in gems. He was unaware that his order was disobeyed and that he was being stealthily followed. Shansun was trailing him.

As Ferguson entered the house of Van Dorp, the mulatto made his way, craftily and unseen, to the rear of the building. There he met Mammy Bean, an old West Indian negress cook, who with Mrs. Wain, a white housekeeper, comprized the menage of the Dutchman.

To Mammy Bean, Shansun told the story of the finding of the black pearl, not forgetting to mention that he thought Ferguson was about to dispose of the gem to her master. The news interested the old negress. She wasn't grieved at Shansun's loss —that was a matter of no interest— but her nimble brain instantly concerned itself in a plot to acquire the pearl. She had a reputation among the colored people as a sorceress, and the possession of a black pearl would

enhance her fame. But first, as a necessary precaution, she desired to know more than the mulatto had told her. This desire could be easily accomplished, for the white housekeeper was away shopping and she would not be likely to return for some time. Mammy Bean quickly decided that eavesdropping was the best way to verify Shansun's story.

Cautioning him to be quiet, she led the way through the house to a front room where Van Dorp and Ferguson were negotiating. The entrance to the room was covered by a portiere, and from where the listeners stood in the hall, the conversation of the white men, as they haggled over the price of the gem, came distinctly to their ears. They heard Van Dorp make a final offer in cash for the pearl, and they heard Ferguson accept the offer, although he insisted the black pearl was worth much more. Then Ferguson warned the Dutchman to put the pearl in a safer place than the tin box where he usually kept his collection of gems. But Van Dorp scoffed at the suggestion of robbery, even though Ferguson insisted that the colored people placed a sentimental value on the black pearl.

Mammy Bean had heard enough to convince herself that Shansun's black pearl was indeed a reality. Motioning to the mulatto to follow her, she rapidly and silently retreated to the rear of the house. There she impressed on Shansun the necessity of getting back to the boat before Ferguson came out of the house. The old negress had all the knowledge she required, and she planned to steal the black pearl without the aid of the mulatto.

The next morning Jan Van Dorp was found in bed, murdered. As our chief was away in New York on a vacation, the responsibility of probing the crime rested on my shoulders, so as soon as I got the news of the murder, I lost no time starting an investigation. With Luner, a colored detective, and Roane, our cleverest white detective, I arrived at the scene of the crime a few minutes after receiving the telephone message.

From Mrs. Wain, the widow who kept house for the old man, I got the pith of the tragedy. Briefly she told me that she had gone to arouse Van Dorp, as was customary every morning. She thought it strange that this morning he didn't answer her call. Opening the door of his bedroom, she glanced inside. To her horror she could see a large patch of blood on the white counterpane. Not waiting to investigate, for she instinctively felt that her master had been slain, she telephoned us. More than that, the agitated woman did not know. We left her and entered the bedroom.

On the bed lay Van Dorp, quite dead. From the nature of the fatal wound, I surmised that the murderer had thrust a dagger through the white quilt, into the heart of the old man. The position of the body, and the orderliness of the bedclothes, showed that the victim had been killed while asleep. Thus it was plain, if robbery were the object of the assassin, Van Dorp had moved in his sleep and so received his quietus. Satisfied as to the correctness of the theory, we then began a search of the room for possible clues.

A cursory glance indicated that everything was in order. None of the furniture had been disturbed, the windows were all fastened, and the inside shutters latched. It was not until Roane, who had been searching in the bureau drawers, found a flimsy tin cash-box that we got the semblance of a clue. The lock on the box had been forced open.

"Robbery!" said Roane, bringing out the box for a closer inspection. He raised the lid with the expectation that his opinion would be justified. But, much to our astonishment, in-

stead of the box being empty, it contained thirty yellowish pearls of various sizes. The find completely upset the theory of robbery as a motive for the crime. Leaving Luner and Roane to continue the search of the bedroom, I went to the kitchen. My intention was to question Mammy Bean, although I didn't feel very sanguine about getting much information from her.

As I entered the kitchen, the old negress, who sat rocking herself, stared curiously at me. That she understood the purpose of my visit was obvious, but whether she knew anything more than Mrs. Wain about the crime was a matter of conjecture. After some adroit questions, which she answered quite frankly, I reached the conclusion that Mammy Bean knew almost nothing of the murder. Thinking thus, I turned to leave the kitchen, but before I left I somehow felt prompted to try a bluff on the old crone. A few minutes previously, she had told me a white man had visited Van Dorp the day before, but she didn't know the name of the visitor. Her ignorance as to the identity of the man may have been an evasion, so I resolved to test her veracity.

"What did you say was the name of the man who saw your master yesterday?" I asked, sharply.

"Massa Ferguson," she replied, committing herself.

"Ha!" I said, elated at having drawn the information; "and what did Ferguson want? You may as well tell me, Mammy Bean. If you know it was Ferguson, you are sure to know the nature of his business with your master."

"He sold a black pearl. I listened to their talk," she told me sullenly.

A black pearl—that was indeed news to me. My astuteness had been amply justified, for the old negress had by a slip of her tongue given me a lead to a palpable clue. Robbery, after all, had been the cause of the murder of Van Dorp.

Realizing from the sullen demeanor of Mammy Bean that to question her further would be useless, I hurried out of the room. My lead pointed to Ferguson for additional information.

Acquainting Roane and Luner with the knowledge I had gained from the negress, I ordered them to stop the search. We had now to seek Ferguson.

Half an hour later, the bow of the police launch grounded on the beach at Agar's Island. Leaving Luner in charge of the launch, Roane and I walked along the path that led to Ferguson's hut. As we approached the place, Roane remarked that everything seemed quiet, adding that perhaps Ferguson and Shansun were away on a fishing trip.

I knocked on the door of the hut, and not receiving an answer I tried the latch. The door opened, and we stepped into a room, which the fisherman used as a living room. Roane rapped on the table and shouted for Ferguson. There was no reply, so thinking that he might be sleeping I drew aside a curtain that separated the bedroom from the living room. Stepping inside, I was startled at what I saw. Ferguson lay stretched on the floor, and his skull had been split.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Roane, he having followed me into the room, "someone must have given him a terrible blow on the head. Is he alive?"

"Just alive, and that's all," I said, as I stooped and examined the injured man. His pulse was weak, his breathing stertorous. Unless I was mistaken, Ferguson had almost reached the last lap of his earthly race.

In the meantime, Roane hurriedly searched the room. From under the bed he brought out a billet of hard cedar wood; on it there was blood and hair.

"Here's the weapon, been thrown under the bed," he said. "But I can't find another trace of his assailant."

"Never mind," I told him, "that can wait. We've got to rush Ferguson to the hospital."

I stooped for the purpose of lifting the injured man at the shoulders. Just as I was going to grasp him, he opened his eyes and stared at me. Quite distinctly he said, "Shansun. Last night. Beware the black pearl!" A gasp, a quiver of the body, and Ferguson passed away.

"Did you hear that?" I asked Roane.

"Yes," he replied.

"Shansun is our man," I said. "He's responsible for both murders."

CARRYING the body of Ferguson, we returned to the launch. I told Luner the details of the second crime. My recital of the facts did not greatly astonish the colored detective.

"The black pearl, sir, is at the bottom of the murders," he remarked. "Shansun either has it now, or else he has tried to get it. While you were away I strolled along the beach, and I discovered that Ferguson's skiff is missing from its moorings. In my opinion, the mulatto has taken the boat, rowed over to Main Island, and is now in hiding."

Luner's deductions seemed plausible. There was nothing to be gained by hunting for Shansun on Agar's Island. So we headed the launch back to Hamilton.

At headquarters, I immediately issued orders for the apprehension of Shansun. With his capture I felt certain we should have the murderer in our grip, together with the malignant pearl, the cause of all the trouble.

All day I stayed in the office anticipating the capture of the mulatto, but as the time passed and the men engaged in the hunt reported failure, I realized that somehow he was managing to elude us. Of course, I also knew, his capture was inevitable in a few days' time. Meanwhile, in view of Mammy Bean's connection with the case, I decided to hold her as a witness.

At dusk, Luner and I started from headquarters with the intention of bringing in the old negress. Leisurely, we sauntered along the Serpentine Road toward the Van Dorp house, and nothing happened to stay our progress until we had arrived at the big rubber tree, which stands at the side of the road, a few hundred yards from our destination. In the dim light we could see two men struggling beneath the tree.

"A fight!" exclaimed Luner, drawing his baton. Together we rushed toward the combatants, and were only an arm's length away from them as one of the men fell to the ground. The other man turned and fled. It was only the matter of a few yards before I grasped the fleeing man by the shoulder. He turned and faced me, and as he turned, a knife flashed in his hand. As he stabbed at me I avoided the blow by an adroit twist, and before he had a chance to use the weapon again, Luner's baton cracked on his head. Without even a groan, he dropped to the ground unconscious. Luner picked up the knife, which was smeared with blood, then he peered into the face of my assailant.

"Jonty Bean, Mammy Bean's son," he said, astonished.

"Jonty Bean!" I repeated, equally surprized. "I wonder where he fits into this puzzle? Put the handcuffs on him, Luner. We'll take him back to the tree."

Carrying Bean we walked to the place where the other man still lay prostrate. Laying down our manacled prisoner, we both looked at the man who had been struggling with

Jonty Bean. Simultaneously, we both recognized him.

"Shansun!" I exclaimed, while Luner gave a low whistle.

The mulatto stared at us, then he feebly tried to raise himself. But his effort was futile; groaning, he sank to the ground.

"I'm done, Massa Bruce," he mumbled. "Jonty Bean's stabbed me in the back. He thought I had the black pearl."

An hour later, Mammy and Jonty Bean were in cells, while Shansun was in the hospital. With Roane, I sat at the bedside of the mulatto taking down his ante-mortem statement, for Shansun was almost due to pass, another victim to the malignancy of the black pearl. Much of his story I have told you, but to enlighten you on some points, I will give you a summary of the mulatto's death-bed statement:

Shansun found the pearl. It was taken from him by Ferguson. Ferguson sold the gem to Van Dorp, and the mulatto and Mammy Bean listened to the negotiations. That night, in a spirit of revenge, Shansun split Ferguson's skull, stole the white fisherman's boat and came to Hamilton with the intention of stealing the pearl from Van Dorp. Previous to the attempt at theft, the mulatto circled around the bungalow, endeavoring to find the easiest point of entry. In his search he came to a window shutter, and part of one of the wooden laths had been broken off. Peering through the crack, he saw it was the old Dutchman's bedroom. Van Dorp was in bed, asleep, and the room was dimly lighted by a coal-oil lamp, for burning a light at night was one of his fads. As Shansun looked into the room, he was startled to see the door being cautiously opened. Jonty Bean entered, followed by Mammy Bean, and they went straight to the bureau where Van Dorp kept his box of pearls. As Jonty Bean pulled open the drawer, Van Dorp moved in bed. Then Jonty Bean stabbed the old man. After the murder he forced open the box. From the gesticulations of rage they both made as they examined the contents of the box, Shansun surmised that the black pearl, for which they were looking, had vanished. Then the mulatto fled from the scene. He went to the big rubber tree, for he knew that in the crotch of the tree there was a hollow of sufficient depth to conceal a man. All day he had lain hidden; at dusk he sneaked out with the intention of begging some food off Mammy Bean. Jonty and his mother were conversing at the rear of Van Dorp's house, when Shansun arrived there. They accused him of knowing the whereabouts of the black pearl, if he hadn't actually stolen it. The mulatto protested, declaring his innocence, then, becoming afraid of the threats of Mammy Bean, he ran away. Jonty Bean followed him, and in the fight that ensued, Shansun got a fatal wound. The mulatto swore he had not seen the pearl since it was in the hand of Ferguson.

That was Shansun's ante-mortem statement. It gave me a solution to the murders, but I was still puzzled as to the whereabouts of the black pearl.

Back at headquarters, I ordered that Mammy and Jonty Bean be brought from the cells. Now I had the deposition of Shansun, I had to charge Jonty Bean with the murder of Van Dorp, and Mammy Bean with being an accessory to the fact. While I awaited their arrival, I commenced to open the mail which lay on my desk. Until then I had been forced to neglect the official correspondence. The first letter I handled was in a thick, foolscap envelope. It was addressed to the chief, but in his absence I had authority to open all correspondence. I took the enclosure

out of the envelope, then I stared mystified, for a dozen blank sheets of writing paper had been used as a packing for another small envelope. I opened the smaller envelope, there was a letter inside, and also to my great astonishment—the black pearl.

I read the letter, it had been written by Van Dorp. He had penned:

"I have a premonition, which refuses to be banished, that the black pearl will be a cause of evil to me. Perhaps my mind has been influenced by the fear of the pearl, which seemed to possess Ferguson, the man from whom I bought the gem. He told me the colored people value the pearl as an emblem of luck, and they would have no scruples about stealing it. Ferguson's warning is good, so I have devised a plan to checkmate the possibility of a theft. Unknown to Mrs. Wain, I have put the pearl, together with this letter to you, in the middle drawer of the bureau in her room. With it, I have placed another letter addressed to her, which instructs her to mail the large envelope to you, should anything happen to me. Fear of a calamity has urged me to adopt this plan. Yet for all my fear, there is some satisfaction in knowing that I shall have outwitted the attempt of anyone who tries to steal the pearl."

As I finished reading the letter, I smiled at the old Dutchman's grim humor. Even while covered by the shadow of the unknown, Van Dorp could not resist the temptation to joke.

Picking up the pearl, I looked at it curiously. It was a good-colored, pear-shaped gem, and as I gazed at it, I pondered on the fate of the three blood-victims it had already claimed since it had been salvaged from the sea.

The entrance of the sergeant and the prisoners aroused me out of my imaginative mood. As the law demands, I cautioned them, then charged Jonty Bean and his mother with the murder of Jan Van Dorp. After I had finished, I picked the pearl off the desk and showed it to Mammy Bean.

"Was it for this your master was murdered?" I asked.

The expression changed on the face of the old negress. From the sullen, defiant look she had shown as she listened to the charge of murder, her face became distorted by a spasm of intense rage. Her mouth twitched and her body quivered, as she mumbled: "The black pearl! Where did you get it?"

"From Mrs. Wain," I said.

She stepped toward me, her hands outstretched as if she intended to grasp the gem. Then, as if her progress had been stayed by an invisible power, she stopped and laughed—a low, weird cackle.

"The black pearl!" she shrilled. "The black pearl, and there's *obi* on it. May it bring disaster, evil and death to those who touch it! May it blind the eyes of those who admire it! Blackness it is, and naught but blackness shall it give forth! May it sear and scorch the flesh of any woman who dares to——"

The dreadful incantation suddenly stopped. The old crone raised her hands to the heavens, then uttered a hideous cry as she fell to the floor with all her faculties completely paralyzed. A stroke, from which she never rallied, had seized her.

Her son, Jonty Bean, was convicted and hanged, thus making the fifth victim of the malignant pearl.

Despite the evil reputation of the black pearl, Sir Henry Klane bought it from the executors of the estate of Jan Van Dorp, and I often used to wonder whether the malignant gem had harmed anyone else. In my opinion, Vince, the Countess of Clamnel was lucky—very lucky, I should say, to escape death.

APRICOTS from ISPAHAN

By

E. Hoffmann Price

"The great two-handed blade rose high, paused an instant ere it began its shearing sweep."

THE sultan Schamas-ad-Din of Djalan-batû yawned prodigiously, rubbed his eyes, blinked, and adjusted his turban. An attendant rearranged the pile of cushions wherefrom the prince had emerged, so that His Highness might more comfortably resume the sitting posture from which he had slumped an hour ago.

A second attendant, kneeling, presented a tray of sweetmeats and a flagon of chilled wine. A third offered the sultan the stem of a narghileh. But the prince wished neither to drink nor to smoke.

"Absál," said the sultan to the scribe who sat at the foot of his master's dais, "of what were we speaking?"

"These papers, my lord."

The wrinkled, leathery old scribe thrust before the sultan's sleepy eyes a bundle of papers and documents.

"Quite so, Absál."

Another world-engulfing yawn.

"Take them out and attend to them. I am very busy today. And by the way, have the apricots arrived?"

"Not yet, my lord. It is a long, hard trip from Persia."

The scribe withdrew, scowling at the great sheaf of papers that represented the neglected affairs of the realm.

The sultan sucked a wisp of smoke from his narghileh, sipped a bit of wine, stroked his curled beard, then turned to the eunuch who guarded the entrance to the harem.

"Saoud, didn't you pick up a Kashmiri dancing girl the other day?"

"She awaits my lord's pleasure."

And without further command, the eunuch entered the seraglio to summon the Kashmiri.

From behind a carven teakwood screen at the sultan's right came the wailing, piping, mournful notes of reed instruments, and the faint pulsing of atabals. The concealed musicians had been awaiting their cue, even as had the Kashmiri girl who was about to make her debut before the sultan.

The piping subsided. Then came three thin, vibrant, shivering notes of a gong; and, as the sighing, whining reeds resumed their cadence, the Kashmiri entered the presence.

Silent, shadowlike, she picked her way across the tiled floor, each step a formal pose to display her slim, serpentine perfection for the sultan's approval. And then she danced with weaving, twining steps and sinuous arms: lithe, wondrous swift, with gesture and contortion that aroused even the phlegmatic despot from his lethargy. A silken veil rippling in the breeze; a moonbeam shimmering on a sword-blade; a wisp of smoke curling from a censer; all these, but surely not a woman it was whose gilded limbs gleamed before the nodding prince. Neither bracelet nor anklet tinkled; for this being her first appearance, she was without jewels, without any tokens of the master's approval.

Again the gong behind the screen shivered its thin, rustling note. The Kashmiri sank in obeisance before her lord to receive from his hand some trophy to flaunt before her rivals in the seraglio.

Schamas-ad-Din drew from his pouch a small, heavy purse, weighed it in his hand a moment, and replaced it. Then from his turban he removed the wondrous Father of Fire, a great, livid ruby that flared fiercely from its bed of diamonds.

"You are from the Valley of Kashmir? And your name?"

"Istalani, my lord."

The girl's eyes gleamed welcome to the magnificence that smoldered before her.

"Ah, yes, I remember now. Kashmir . . . a land of rich gardens. . ."

The sultan fingered the massive ruby and its adamantine companions.

"Rich gardens . . . the finest and loveliest of my apricot trees, even now on the way from Ispahan, shall be named after you," concluded the sultan as with a magnificent gesture he dismissed the girl and replaced the glowing jewel in his turban.

Whereupon Schamas-ad-Din arose from his dais and went into the gardens to prepare with his own hands the earth that was to receive the long-awaited apricot trees.

AFFAIRS of state and the administrative duties of a monarch were nothing, and less than nothing, to the Sultan Schamas-ad-Din of Djalanbatû. Absál, the ancient secretary and ex-captain of the guard he had inherited from his father, had the administration of affairs so well in hand that the horticultural prince had but to sign on the dotted line, then spend the remainder of the day in his gardens. At times, of course, he would in person dispense capricious justice in the halls of public or private audience, and at times pause for an hour of soporific music and the intricate dances of his sultanas; but these were after all but distractions from his important mission in life, that of pottering about in his extensive gardens. Here, certainly, was the perfect, un-

troubled life of a prince who reigned painlessly and without care.

The following morning, as was his custom, Absál awaited the sultan in his study and arranged for his inspection the previous day's accumulation of papers: petitions, communications from neighboring princelings, statements from the *Feringhi* engineers who worked the rich mineral deposits of Djalan-batû and for the privilege paid royalties so heavy that the taxation of the sultan's subjects had become a useless formality. And all these affairs were handled as capably by Absál as they had been administered by the chief wazir whose recent death had left the scribe heir to the duties, though not the rank, of the deceased.

The responsibilities were Absál's, though not the title, the prestige, nor the privilege of that high office. And for this the old man had to thank Zaid, the court astrologer, the crafty star-gazer who played well and skilfully on the sultan's credulity. Schamas-ad-Din had informally promised Absál the post of chief wazir; and then he had become evasive. In due course the truth leaked out, reaching the scribe's ears in a fairly complete report of the conversation that had wrecked his chances of advancement.

". . . Absál doubtless is learned, but he is simple-minded . . . lacking in the astuteness requisite to a chief wazir, one who must partake in a measure of my lord's cunning and shrewdness . . . consider, my lord, the unhappy configuration, here in the sixth house. And see, here in the ascendant, what unfavorable signs . . . surely my lord will not consider elevating Absál to that high position when all the omens and all the stars are against it. . ."

And then the sultan had sidestepped, asking the astrologer who, then, he would recommend. Whereat the astrologer had dissembled, not deeming it wise at that time to offer his own uncle as a candidate; for even the sultan's obtuseness had its limits.

All this Absál learned and in a measure verified by seeing that day by day the uncle of the astrologer became more and more prominent at court. But the scribe could do no more than curse all stars and all star-gazers, and patiently wait for the opportunity that would enable him to discredit his enemy.

The scribe had scarcely commenced his day's work when Zaid entered, laden with charts, and resplendent in the garb of his office.

"And with you be peace," returned Absál to the astrologer's salutation, then resumed his task.

Before the scribe had arranged the portfolio of documents in heaps according to their nature and ultimate disposal, the sultan himself entered, preceded by eight cadaverous Annamite fan-bearers, and followed by his personal attendants.

"A thousand years!" greeted Zaid and the scribe as they made their salaam to the prince.

"What news this morning, Absál?"

"The *Feringhi* engineers seem bent on robbing us."

"And what of my apricot trees?" interrupted the sultan, before the scribe could report on the mining syndicate.

"They arrived last night, my lord. Here is a message from the head porter. Now as to the *Feringhi*. . ."

"Let that wait. You should have notified me last night the moment those trees arrived. Zaid, determine a day propitious to their planting. And you, Absál, check them in immediately, and note their condition carefully. Report to me as soon as you are through."

The astrologer busied himself with his charts.

Absál departed on his urgent mis-

sion, letting the affairs of the realm take care of themselves.

"Each worth its weight in gold, and more," reflected the scribe, as he checked those young apricot trees whose commonplace appearance belied their precious character, priceless in view of their long trip from Persia, and doubly so in view of the sultan's whim.

"Seventy-two . . . seventy-three . . . this one can not survive . . . seventy-four . . . this one has been scorched . . . seventy-five . . . someone's head will answer for this . . . seventy-six . . . seventy-seven . . . boy, the sultan spoke of forty trees; and there are over eighty in this lot."

"You are right, uncle. But look at their labels and you will see that they are not all apricot trees, even though they do look much alike. Half of them are nectarines."

"Well then, and did he also order nectarines?"

"No. But the head porter brought them along as a bit of speculation. It costs no more to carry eighty than forty. He will sell them in the *souk* today."

"So . . . well, help me sort them out. And by the way, I may buy some of those nectarines for my own garden. Gardening is the great game here . . . perhaps the road to royal favor," mused the scribe as he departed.

When Absál sought the sultan to inform him that the trees had been checked in and were in good condition, he found him still in conference with Zaid, who, with charts deployed, was laying his customary fog of astrological jargon.

"A few have been slightly damaged, my lord; but the count is nevertheless in excess of what you expected. I have just turned them over to the chief gardener."

"Allah forbid! I must plant them with my own hands, three days hence, at an hour to be named by Zaid. Tell Musa . . . never mind, I'll tell him myself."

"But what of these papers, my lord?"

"Take them with you. I will be busy all day. You can handle them."

Upon leaving the sultan, Absál sought the head porter and bought the lot of nectarine slips, paying then and there the exorbitant price he demanded. This done, he made short work of affairs of state. But despite his haste, it was late in the afternoon before he was free to pursue some recently conceived plans of his own.

His first move was to go in search of Musa, the chief gardener; not at his house, but in the various *caravanserai* and wine shops near the *souk*. In the third tavern he found Musa, drunk, as usual, but not, as Absál expected, riotously gleeful.

"Peace be with you, friend Musa," saluted the scribe.

The gardener returned the peace, and, flattered at the notice of so high a person, offered him wine. And with the wine he inflicted his latest grievance, told how the sultan had, in the presence of the gardeners under him, strictly forbidden him to touch those precious apricot trees; had forbidden him, Musa, to set out those accursed trees from Persia.

"Well now," thought Absál, as he heard the gardener's sorrows, "this is excellent. The chances are that I'll not even have to suggest it. . . Still . . . it might never occur to this ass of a gardener that it would be a rare jest to sprinkle salt about the roots of those fiend-begotten trees, and then watch them mysteriously wilt and die. . ."

After numerous drafts of Musa's wine, Absál contrived to put in a few words of his own.

"That is what I call lack of appreciation! To think of affronting you,

who for twenty years served his father, upon whom be peace!"

"And exceeding prayer!" interjected Musa. "That was bad enough; but that was but half of it."

The gardener gulped a glass of wine, grimaced fiercely, and simmered in his grievances.

"So. . . Really, you interest me strangely, Musa. Come to my house where we can talk in privacy, and drink Shirazi from the sultan's own cellar," suggested Absál.

And thus it was that shortly after sunset, the scribe and the chief gardener reeled across the courtyard of the palace, chanting in broken, uncertain cadence. The gardener's gloom was alternated with flashes of his usual good humor. With song and denunciation drunkenly mingled, they tottered into Absál's quarters; and, upon the advent of the scribe's servant with a jar of Shirazi, began anew the discussion of their several sorrows.

"Drink wine, oh my brother, for the world is but a breath of wind," hiccupped Absál, who was scarce as drunk as he seemed.

"Iblis fly away with your wine," protested the gardener.

But unable to resist the old man's invitation to drink the master's wine, he drained the glass at a draft.

"And the black hands of Abbadon strangle all sultans and all astrologers!"

"Especially all astrologers," suggested Absál.

"Especially all sultans!" contradicted Musa.

"Well now, friend, you have your grievances. But why feel so bitter about it? The chances are that the gardeners under you did not even hear the sultan's words."

Musa stared somberly into the depths of his Cairene goblet.

"A mere trifle, that. Come now, Musa, tell me the truth," wheedled the scribe. "What is on your mind? If I remember rightly, you suggested. . ."

"Many things. Remember, ten days ago, they sold a Kashmiri girl in the *souk?* Lovely as the morning star. . ."

"Remember? Well now, and were I not an old man, I would have bought her myself. And it seems to me that you were there, bidding heavily."

"To what end?" queried the gardener dolorously. "That fat eunuch outbid me in behalf of the sultan, that old wind-bag with more girls than he could name in a day. Oh, loveliest of all loveliness! And that father of many little piglings robbed me of her, bidding his great wealth against my poverty. And I could have bought her otherwise, for no one else was bidding against me."

"So that is the lay of the land, eh, Musa? Well, and I should grieve also, were I in your place. But is it not written. . ."

"Rot! You with your Persian verses. . ."

"Softly, Musa, softly! Do you suppose that the Kashmiri was pleased with the bargain? Surely she would prefer a handsome young fellow like yourself. And didn't she weep when Saoud led her to the palace?"

And then Absál, to whom came all palace gossip, related the tale of the Kashmiri's debut, and of her rich reward.

"Named a tree after her!"

The gardener spat disgustedly, then stared sourly at the gilded scrolls on the wall.

"Tell me, Musa, are you really a man of courage? Do you really want the girl? It happens that Saoud has me to thank that his head is still above his shoulders. He can refuse me nothing within reason. I think—I am sure it could be arranged."

The ensuing half-hour was spent in smothering the gardener's protesta-

tions of gratitude and assurances as to his courage.

THE succeeding three days were slow of passage, weary and anxious and nerve-racking to gardener and sultan alike. The former thought of the lovely Kashmiri behind the barred windows of the seraglio, looking, perhaps, into the very garden wherein he worked; the latter counted the hours and fretfully awaited the sunset of that day which would be favorable to the planting of those fine young apricot trees from Ispahan.

Absál went about his duties as usual. At times he permitted himself a shadow of a smile as his lean old talons stroked his long, white beard. And the smile widened whenever he caught sight of the astrologer. The old man even went so far as to purchase a silver-white *Kochlani* stallion, richly caparisoned after the Moorish fashion.

"A chief wazir," he reflected, "should be well mounted when he appears in public."

SUNSET of the third day. The astrologer, with the sultan at his side, stood in the garden, waiting for the lord of the sign to rise into the position of good omen. At last he lowered his astrolabe.

"Now, my lord, you may plant the first tree. The one named after the Kashmiri. And be assured that they will flourish and prosper in the shadow of your magnificence," he concluded, as he received from the sultan's hand a small purse, heavy as only gold could make it.

Musa stood by with the necessary implements, fidgeting and pacing about as the sultan with scrupulous care set each tree in place, checked its alinement with its mates, irrigated it with rose-water. And from time to time the chief gardener glanced over his shoulder at a cavernous, barred window overlooking the garden.

The sultan, wearied at last by his own frenzy of enthusiasm, left the garden, followed by the astrologer.

No sooner had the gate closed after them than Absál emerged from the shadow of a plane-tree. The gardener approached at the scribe's low whistle.

"She is expecting you, Musa."

"And she will go?"

"She favors you. But it is for you to persuade her. Tap at the bars of that window. And if you can convince her of your worth, she will tell you of the means I have devised for her escape. I will be waiting with horses just outside the garden wall. You can pass the sentries at the Eastern Gate, and once clear, ride across the border into Lacra-kai, where you can rest secure under the protection of an old friend of mine high in the rajah's favor. Or would you rather not leave the service of the master you have served so long?"

"Iblis fly away with all sultans! . . . What's that?" whispered Musa, lowering his voice at the sound of a heavy step and the tinkle of spurs just outside the garden gate.

"Only the captain of the guard on his way to inspect the sentries along the city wall. If he is at the gate, you can not pass, even though I have bribed the sentries. So lose no time! And I will go out on the wall and detain him."

Whereupon Absál departed to seek the captain of the guard, leaving Musa to meet his fate at the barred window.

After several unsuccessful attempts, Musa drew himself to the crest of the wall, just beneath the window, whose sill was at about the height of his shoulders. With the garden keys he tapped lightly on the bars; waited a moment; tapped again.

Silence, save for the splashing waters of a near-by fountain; not a

sound came from within the seraglio. Standing there on the wall beneath that forbidden window, Musa felt all the eyes of Djalan-batû were impaling him. And from the blackness within he felt destruction blindly groping to reach and strangle him. He cursed the dazzling whiteness of the moonlight; shivered at the thought of what would befall him if his mad escapade were witnessed; damned all scribes and all Kashmiri girls; but, just on the point of sinking back into the garden, he collected himself and tapped again.

Out of the blackness of that forbidden apartment came a breath of jasmine, and musk, and nenufar; then a misty, nebulous whiteness materialized, took form before his eyes; the Kashmiri, lovely beyond the maddest of all desires, was at the window, her slim fingers curled about the bars that kept him from her. She smiled graciously, as might a goddess at the adoration of a clown.

Before that wondrous beauty Musa felt his courage evaporate. Who would dare aspire to such perfection?

"You are the Emir Musa whom the sultan outbid in the *souk?*"

She had mistaken him, a gardener, for an emir!

"Even so, Lady of Beauty. And I am here to take you to Lacra-kai, where I have powerful friends."

"You will take me . . . if I will go."

"But you will go. For I love and desire you as no man ever desired any woman."

"But the danger. . ."

"Hurry, and we are safe. Didn't you smile at me as I made my bids, and weep when they took you to the sultan? Surely you will go . . . tonight."

"I might . . . I will . . . if . . ." she conceded.

"If what?"

"If you will first uproot those accursed apricot trees to leave a fare-well token for that old wine-skin who named one of them after me! They mock me day and night, those female hyenas! Anywhere, Musa. . . The bars of this window have been sawed at the top. So destroy those trees and then release me."

"We have no time."

"Nonsense."

"Then kiss me, Wondrous One."

"First uproot those wretched trees and I will deny you nothing. Hurry!"

A low, rippling laugh, half of delight, half of mockery, urged the gardener to his task as he dropped from his perch upon the wall.

Vengeance, and the Kashmiri, and then a fast horse. . .

"My lord," announced Absál, shortly after the hour of morning prayer of the following day, "there are numerous letters that require your personal attention."

"Write the answers yourself and have them ready for me when I return. I am going to inspect. . ."

"A thousand years!" saluted the captain of the guard as he clanked to a halt at the foot of the dais.

"Why this haste, Isa?" snapped the sultan. "Riots? Insurrection?"

"Worse than that, my lord. A madman entered the gardens last night and uprooted. . ."

"What? My apricots?"

"Even so. I captured him last night as he was uprooting the last tree."

"Carve him in a thousand pieces! Impale him! Flay him alive!" sputtered the sultan. "Bring him in immediately."

And then and there the sultan rushed into the garden, cursing the earth, and the heavens, and the powers that made them both. Isa was right: not a tree had been left in place. Each of those precious apricot slips had been uprooted and broken, and now lay wilting in the fierce

morning sun, ruined beyond all redemption.

"All the way from Ispahan," mourned Schamas-ad-Din as he staggered back to the throne-room, stunned and dumb from the sight of that ruin.

Coincident with the sultan's return from the scene of destruction was the arrival of Isa, followed by a detachment of the guard.

"The prisoner, my lord," announced the captain, indicating the heavily shackled culprit.

The sultan, upon recognizing Musa, exploded afresh.

Realizing the enormity of his offense, the gardener knew that there remained but to learn the sultan's fancy in unusual torments. There was no plea to be offered. With dumb resignation he faced the sultan's frenzy. To say that the Kashmiri had urged him to the deed would but add to the sultan's wrath.

As from a great distance now came the sultan's choking, apoplectic tirade. At the right of the dais stood the African executioner, fingering his crescent-bladed simitar. And there was the astrologer who had caused him, Musa, to be humiliated before his subordinates. Very trivial it all seemed now. And to the left sat the scribe, calm, expressionless, placidly stroking his long, white beard; there was the man who had urged him to his madness. It all seemed unreal, fantasmal. And the sultan's torrent of wrath rolled on, threatening torment without end for him, Musa.

Then the scribe smiled as one viewing a spectacle that, though wearisome, still has its amusing features. Absál, the cause of it all, smiling!

"It's his fault, my lord! The Kashmiri told me to destroy them. . . ."

And thus, incoherently, he blurted forth the entire story.

The astrologer's exultation was boundless.

"Did I not prophesy, my lord? What manner of chief wazir would this old traitor Absál have been?"

The sultan choked; turned the color of an old saddle.

The African glanced from one culprit to the other, wondering which would first need his attention.

And then the captain of the guard put in a word.

"My lord, this man is stark mad. Absál had nothing to do with it. In fact, it was he who informed me that a maniac was uprooting your trees, and sent me to capture him. But I was too late to save the apricots."

"Even so, my lord," confirmed Absál, after crucifying the astrologer with a glance, "I found him in the *caravanserai*, drunk with wine and drugged with hasheesh. He babbled of the affront offered him when my lord with his own hands desired to plant those trees. And he raved of a Kashmiri girl. Look and see whether there are hoof-prints where he claimed that horses were waiting to take him and the girl to Lacra-kai. And see also whether the bars in that window are really sawed through. What? Am I to answer for the frenzy of a madman?"

All of which convinced the sultan.

"Anoint him in boiling oil! Bathe him with molten lead!" coughed the prince, indicating Musa. "No, carve him in small pieces here and now!"

Four members of the guard, each seizing a limb, dragged the gardener to his knees on the tiles before the dais.

The African advanced, gaged the distance, twice stamped the tiles and set himself, all poised to strike. The great two-handed blade rose high, paused an instant ere it began its shearing sweep . . .

"Stop!"

The clear voice of the old scribe startled the African with its note of command, so that the rhythm of his stroke was broken. He lowered his blade and glared at Absál.

The sultan leaped to his feet.

"He is not guilty," declared the scribe.

"What? Didn't he admit his guilt?"

"Even so, *he* is not guilty."

"Explain yourself," snapped the sultan.

"Mountain of Wisdom," began the scribe, "why did you with your own hand set out those trees instead of letting Musa plant them?"

The scribe's calm insolence amazed the sultan into answering.

"Because the learned astrologer had named a fortunate day for their planting. And then this imbecile uproots them, after they had been set out under favorable omens."

"Even so, Light of the World," interposed the star-gazer. "The signs. . ."

"Now, by the Prophet's beard and by your life!" exulted Absál. "This astrologer is the true criminal! He said that such and such was the fortunate hour, and lo, behold them already dying! Uprooted and ruined! What manner of prophecy is this?"

"My lord. . ."

"Silence, fool! He is right. Son of an infidel pig, why did you name such an unfortunate hour?"

The African renewed his grip on the hilt of his simitar and sought the sultan's eye. Two members of the guard advanced toward the star-gazer.

"Impale him in the square. Flay him alive and stretch his hide on the Eastern Gate," directed the sultan. "And you, Absál, publish a proclamation banishing all astrologers from the city."

"Spare his worthless carcass, my lord," protested Absál. "Scourge him out of the city, but spare his life. For your apricots are safe and sound. I anticipated that this ass of an astrologer would cast a false horoscope, so I took your trees from the porters and in their place substituted nectarines, which you set out. And thus your apricots await your pleasure."

"ABSAL," remarked the sultan that evening, as they watched Musa setting out the apricots from Ispahan, "this was all a most curious affair . . . this Kashmiri, by the way, is not really to my taste. Perhaps you would accept her as a token. . ."

"Peace and prayer upon my lord, but forty years ago, when I served in the guard, I had my fill of strife and battle. Why not give her to Musa, so that each may be the other's punishment?"

"But you are a subtle man, Absál," replied the admiring prince. "And now that you are chief wazir, I may be able to devote more time to my gardens."

A Snake-tale of India

The Mystic Bowl

By EUGENE CLEMENT D'ART

"MERRY" Roy McFarland, the American builder of bridges, who reached India in the flower of his youth and reveling in the happiness of honeymoon times, returned to New York a few months later, a single, broken man.

Out of the all-pervading jungle had come devastating vengeance, swift, silent and merciless, exacting a life for a life. And this which was intended to bring laughter to the hearts of men turned in an instant to grim tragedy.

Shaken to the core, they who had sought amusement reluctantly left Roy alone with the ghastly remains of the girl he loved that he might weep unashamed and wonder as all wondered at the manner of her death.

Nor would the mystery have been solved, were it not for Hadji, the fakir, who mirrored the memory of things in the clear waters of the Mystic Bowl.

ANN MCFARLAND had followed her young husband to San Francisco, then to Jaipur and then to Khatu, on the edge of the desert. She loved India, perhaps because she worshiped her husband—and he was in India. With him beside her, she would have loved any land. But the jungle filled her with apprehension and snakes with dread, nameless and unreasoning.

Young people do foolish things. Roy decided to cure her of this which seemed senseless fear and was perhaps instinct.

From the jungle, one day, came a band of natives, beating tom-toms, singing and triumphantly dragging the sinuous shape of a cobra they had killed. Roy bought their trophy, hiding it in the long grass near the bungalow until evening came.

After dark, while Ann prepared refreshments, he told his plan to the postmaster and the British lieutenant who had drifted in as had become their custom. The dead snake rested on the couch in the bedroom. That she might not be frightened more than was necessary, they would discuss snakes and warn Ann. Then Roy would trump up some excuse and send her into the room. She would scream, no doubt. Then they would demonstrate how harmless snakes are —when they are dead. And all would laugh.

The two strangers readily entered into the spirit of the jest. When Ann returned, snakes formed the topic of conversation. She frowned lightly.

"Please don't!" she asked. "You know how I hate snakes!"

"Because you do not know them," returned the postmaster. "The majority of snakes fear you as much as you fear them. Barring the deadly cobra, they will strike human beings only in self-defense."

"I bet," smiled the lieutenant, "that Mrs. McFarland would be frightened if she saw a dead snake!"

"Why, no," exclaimed the young wife, "dead snakes do not bite!"

"Still, if you suddenly came upon

a dead snake, somewhere in the house, I am certain——"

"Tush! How could a dead snake come into the house?"

"Excuse me, dear," broke in McFarland, "would you mind bringing me a clean handkerchief?"

Ann walked into the bedroom. The three men looked at each other, smiling and listening expectantly. To reach the little table on which rested the lamp, she had to pass the couch. She would light the lamp, turn around and then——

But she did not light the lamp. In the dark, she uttered a terrific scream. Then she suddenly appeared at the door, a tragic, swaying figure, deathly pale, her arm extended, showing two small, red punctures.

"I have been bitten——" she said.

Before anyone could reach her side, she fainted. Two hours later, she was dead. In the bedroom, the lifeless form of the snake still lay stretched on the couch, as Roy had arranged it. They removed the horrible thing and in its place, gently, very gently, Roy and the lieutenant set down the remains of this living ray of sunshine that had been Ann McFarland. At the window, near the foot of the bed, the mosquito netting was flapping in the breeze. Mechanically, the postmaster pulled it back into place.

For days, within the screen walls of the bungalow porch, Roy sat on his hammock, stupefied, oblivious of his surroundings, irresponsive to the sympathy of friends.

She who had been everything to him was buried at the edge of the jungle she feared, the jungle that had brought her death. And now, nothing mattered.

A hand was softly laid on Roy's shoulder. He was conscious of dark eyes peering kindly into his own. Hadji's bland, melodious voice reached his ear.

"Forget, sahib! You must forget! Death is part of life—a change—a becoming. Because there is birth, there is death. Ay, *sahib,* she still lives. Change has come and altered the face of things but this which is can not cease to be. Life is an eternal becoming. Sorrow, *sahib,* is an extreme, an evil, a passion that must be controlled. We must follow the Middle Path, *sahib,* and forget!"

"If only I knew how she died, Hadji! The snake was dead! How can a dead snake bite?"

"The ways of the world are strange, *sahib.* It seems incredible that a dead snake should bite. And yet, perchance, the soul of the snake —though this too seems impossible— but who knows? Perhaps, if you wish to learn, I can show you how it happened."

Roy looked up slowly, then, his throat parched, asked: "How?"

"It is difficult to explain, though you may understand. I have once seen a camera and was told how it worked. Pictures of objects that are before this camera register through a lens on the film. Now, *sahib,* as soon as the picture has been taken, it *is* on the film. Yet, it can not be seen— not until the film has been treated. Things have a memory, *sahib,* all things photograph happenings—even thoughts. But the proper lens is needed for us to see and that lens is within ourselves. If you wish, *sahib,* I shall tell you what to do and then you may learn how the dead snake struck——"

"What must I do?"

"The room where death passed is impregnated with the memory of this which has happened. Let us first go there."

Mechanically, Roy led the way and then watched Hadji place on the table a small bowl, a plain wooden bowl similar to those carried by Hindoo Holy Men. This he filled with water and, turning to Roy:

"Have you anything that has belonged to her?" he asked.

Roy frowned.

"I have her diamond ring," he said hesitatingly as, handling it with infinite care, he brought out the jewel.

"I shall not touch it, *sahib*. Place it yourself in the bowl."

Roy watched it sink. And now Hadji became the master who directed his actions:

"Watch the ring, *sahib*, look at the diamond, only at the diamond. The water is a mirror. In this mirror you will see all that has happened. Do you not see the room, dark, as it was when death came? Look at the diamond, only at the diamond, *sahib!*"

Strange drowsiness overcame Roy's senses as he stared at the stone that glimmered at the bottom of the water. Then, all at once, it seemed that the diamond and the bowl grew and grew and the water within the bowl encompassed the whole room, plunged in semi-darkness, as it was that night. On the couch, Roy could dimly perceive the shape of the dead snake.

Faintly, as if they came from a great distance, Roy heard Hadji's words: "The window! Watch the window!"

The lower corner of the mosquito netting vibrated under the empire of some exterior force. It gave way. A repulsive head appeared through the opening, the head of a cobra. Then the reptile crawled in through the window, to the bed, until it reached the side of the dead snake. And still, distantly, faintly, came Hadji's voice:

"Its mate, *sahib*, the mate of the dead snake. The cobra that was killed was dragged through the jungle and the one that remained alive followed its scent. It has come to seek its mate and now that it has found it dead, it will kill. Watch the door, *sahib!*"

Ann walked in, her form silhouetted against the light in the other room. She started toward the lamp, but as she passed the couch, the cobra struck and, apparently frightened by her scream, turned swiftly to the window and glided through the opening it had made.

Song of the Brothers of Mercy*

By FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

(Translated by Francis Hard)

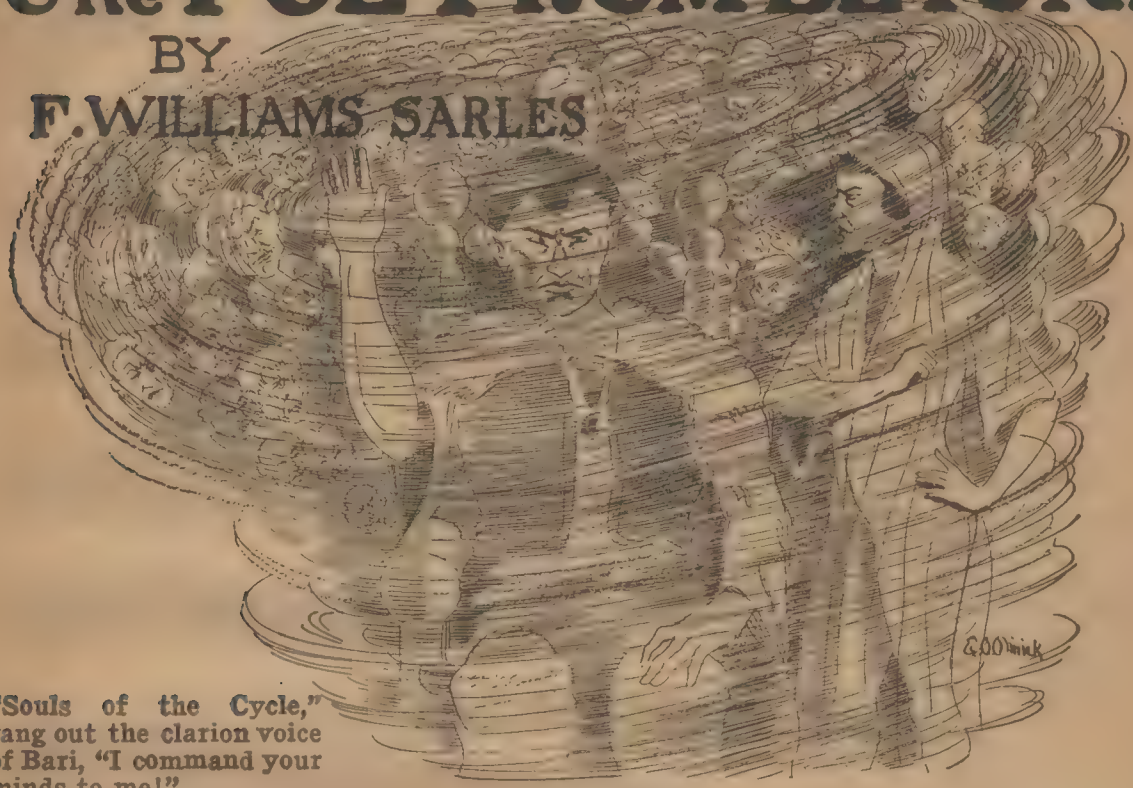
With rapid pace on strideth Death;
No breathing spell to man is given:
Midway the course Death stops his breath,
And sends him to his God unshriven;
And whether he's prepared or no,
Each man before his Judge must go.

* From "Wilhelm Tell."

The FOE FROM BEYOND

BY

F. WILLIAMS SARLES



"Souls of the Cycle," rang out the clarion voice of Bari, "I command your minds to me!"

MAJESTIC columns on every side, rising in grandeur until their tops were lost in the infinity of space. Forests of them, gleaming with ineffable splendor, enclosing at their gigantic bases a coliseum, completely surrounding a platform supported by alternate black and white pillars, seven of them to every side of a pentagon.

From the platform, tier upon tier of encircling steps radiated back to the columns, which, from this place in the center, seemed hazy in the immeasurable distance.

On the platform was a splendid throne. Intricate in its designs, delicate in the tracery of mystic symbols which covered every surface, it could not be said to have any definite color, for it constantly changed its hue, as though lights of sublime beauty were suffusing it. At no time did it seem real.

Over the whole was an atmosphere of unreality, an ethereal tone, as though this mighty temple were a thing of ephemeral, fairylike beauty and quality, to vanish at a breath.

A breath? It would vanish at a thought, for this tremendous structure had been created by thought, the only reality in the Second Cycle.

At this particular pin-point of time in the eternity of the Cycle, some event of moment was about to take place. The vast theater suddenly became misty, half-sounds whispered through its immensity. Vague shadows seemed to flit about, to become half real at times, only to slip back into nothingness. After a short while all this ceased. There was a moment of deathlike silence, as if the very condition of being were held suspended. Then—tier upon tier of the steps held white, robed figures, each with eyes fixed on the throne in the center.

The Thought Council had con-

vened, that august body which through Bari guides the course of the Second Cycle.

The Second Cycle! Abode of the Dead!

Ever since the day Paul Duval discovered the ray which separates the soul from the body, I had been caught in a whirl of events, the like of which has never before been the experience of any man. Even now, I find it hard to believe that it was I, Harry Chaptel, who witnessed and took part in these scenes, or that it was a mere human like Paul Duval who brought them to pass.

Some of you have read my previous accounts of Duval's weird experiment, and of how Duval and I entered the realm of Tasmari, Queen of the Vortex. But for those who have not, I shall briefly sketch what happened.

Paul Duval had begun with the theory that since matter and energy are indestructible, so, too, must be that force which is neither. Some call it the Soul, others the Intelligence. He held that since it was "Intelligence," it must of its own nature remain an entity even after it had left the body.

To reason thus was one thing, to prove it another. If his reasoning were accurate, he thought it likely the entity released from the body was of some fluidic matter, too tenuous to reflect the sun's light, hence invisible. Since the eyes are capable of registering but a small fraction of the total sun's rays, to make his "spirits" visible, he set out to fashion an apparatus which would make all the rays visible to the eyes, and hence, by reflection, bring the departed soul to the sight of man.

The result of his work was the ray and the screen against which it was projected. The joint action of the two made any spirit body, interposed between the screen and the projectors of the ray, visible.

Yes, Duval succeeded in his quest, but often have I wished he had failed. At any rate, the ray proved the truth of his deduction, and it soon showed itself possessed of other powers on which he had not reckoned.

One night a woman's form came into the beam of the ray. At sight of her Duval's lips parted in a wondering cry.

"Marguerite," he murmured, and I knew the shade for the soul of the only woman Paul had ever loved, and to whose memory he remained faithful, though she had died years before.

She held out her arms to him. He entered the ray and fell to the floor as he kissed her. Then his spirit rose from the inert body and went away with the woman, leaving his body alive, yet dead, in the ray-flood. I say "alive yet dead" advisedly, for though it could maintain life if fed, the brain housed no thoughts, no will guided the aimless motions of the body. Intelligence, or if you wish, the soul, had fled. Do not tell me the "soul" and "life" are identical. Duval's body, after the Intelligence had gone, was only a shell. That body had no more soul than a jelly-fish, though, as in a jelly-fish, the spark of life was present.

Thus was the discovery made that the ray could separate the soul from the body, leaving the body a fit habitation for the soul's return. Not like death, which leaves the machine so damaged the life-force can not animate the body.

It was five years before I heard again from Duval. Then his voice came to me over the radio, ordering me to recondition the apparatus for making the ray. I did so.

Having accomplished a projection, I was myself hurled into the Second Cycle, being hypnotized by the eyes of a figure which the ray partially materialized, into entering the ray. At one moment I was safe in the laboratory. The next, and I was looking

into the room from the reverse side of the screen, which appeared to me as a doorway leading back. But to enter that door again was not allowed to me until much had happened.

The Second Cycle is a realm of thought. It is the empire of souls departed from life, co-existent with the material world, a part and yet not a part of the universe. Thought is the only reality, the only force, the only material, there. It is another dimension, the second cycle of the spirit's progress toward something beyond,—perhaps perfection.

Bari rules it by the power of thought. Each soul on entering must give over to Bari's control that part of its being we know as the subconscious. The part we know as the conscious will is retained. But Bari has a Thought Council, faithful to him, as you shall see, which he controls by the massed force of the subconscious wills in the Cycle, even as the Council governs the massed wills by the power of suggestion. Bari controls the thought flow from either direction.

Hating Marguerite for luring Duval into the ray, I soon had cause to love her as greatly as I had hated. Without her, we should still be in the power of Bari and Tasmari.

I found Duval set apart in the Cycle. By the power of thought an insulation known as an "isolation barrier," seemingly composed of some clear, strange, amberlike substance, had been thrown about him. It held him motionless and prevented his thoughts from going out, or thoughts of others from reaching him. Alone I could not have freed him. But Marguerite showed me the way. Concentrating my thought on the barrier itself, I had broken it down, though by some odd force, I was nearly drawn into it beside Duval.

Duval told me he had incurred Bari's enmity because he dared to desire to return to the Life Side and rejoin his body. Bari feared for his power if the souls on the Life Side became acquainted with the fact they must yield their subconsciousness on entering the Cycle. If enough refused this, Bari's rule would end.

The one thing feared by the souls in the Cycle was the Vortex. What it was none knew. Some thought it was the end of the soul cast therein, that it was the "death of the soul;" others that it was the entrance to a next state of existence, which all believed they would attain. Some thought it meant annihilation. None knew what it was save that a soul cast into it never was seen again in the Cycle. None understood it; therefore all feared it. Tasmari, sister of Bari, was queen over it.

Duval and I had nearly won through to the screen to rejoin our bodies, when it was discovered Paul had been freed from his isolation barrier. Instantly the thought forces of the Cycle were brought into play by Bari, drawing us hurtling back to the Cycle, to a mighty colonnaded temple. Here mighty Bari pronounced his decrees, surrounded in state by the members of his Thought Council, whose power through Bari enforced his commands.

We were tried, after a fashion, and because Paul had given control of his subjective will to the Cycle on entering, Bari had the power over him. I had not done so, and on my promise never to divulge the secrets of the Cycle, was given permission to return to my body. Duval was sentenced to the Vortex.

Bidden to see the end, I had watched Paul poised on the brink of the abyss which contained the Vortex.

It was then Margurite defied Bari and his Council. She interposed her will between Paul and Bari, though she knew it might mean her destruction.

She gave us time to enter the ray and fight our way into our bodies. We had seen Bari bend his awful

power on her, and had seen her stand fast. But, she could not but wilt under it. Indeed we knew she had been broken, for as we gained our bodies, we felt the pull of the Cycle on us—too late.

We could only hope an easy fate had been hers—and Duval was broken-hearted. He worked night and day to free her through the ray, but——

Thus matters stood at the time described at the opening of this narrative. I am giving the details as accurately as I may, not having been a witness to what happened. It was told me later by no less a person than Tasmari,—but that is another tale. Other incidents in what I am about to relate were also told to me by others, except the last act, in which I was one of the players.

MOMENT after moment passed after the white-robed figures appeared, and still the throne remained untenanted. Finally a shadow flitted across it and the vaguest suggestion of a form appeared there. It flickered out; rapidly grew in intensity once more, until—on the seat of majesty a male figure appeared.

Noble in his proportions; splendid in the anger which gathered on his brow; beautiful in the physical; he dominated the vast gathering with an impression of boundless power, of which he seemed to be the essence. And he was power, for Bari controlled the subjective wills of countless souls.

He held up his hand for silence. A sigh of expectancy swept through the assemblage, dying away as the audience leaned forward the better to hear.

Bari looked over the throng with a searching gaze.

"Where is Tasmari, my sister?" he asked. There was no response.

" 'Tis as I thought," he cried wrathfully at last, when no one answered. "Since Tasmari is not here, it is not difficult to say why. She fears to come. Her own guilt shall accuse her."

"Bari was long in appearing," said a figure on the foremost row.

"Yea! That I was. Tasmari tried to prevent the convening of the Council. Tried to prevent me, Bari, from appearing before you. Did you feel a counter-thought to my call?"

"Yes! yes!" came from many. "A thought which cried us away from the temple impinged on our wills, O mighty Bari."

"And I, to whom all by our system should yield obedience, found myself scarce able to reach the throne." He smiled coldly. "My sister's power grows apace." Then savagely, "She could not oppose me thus were all my Council loyal. But mark me, I shall root out every disloyal member."

A shudder of uneasiness swayed through the multitude.

"Come! Let us have it now. Shall Bari or Tasmari rule?"

"Bari! Bari!" came the answer, though faintly the outer tiers seemed to cry "Tasmari."

Bari smiled in triumph.

"I shall shortly put your loyalty to a test," he stated. "A situation has risen which may disrupt the Cycle and usher in the ancient chaos, when there was no head nor government to the Cycle, and soul met soul in strife. To take measures against this, I have summoned you."

Bari ceased speaking for a moment. As he did so a sort of haze seemed to gather about him and his head drooped. For a second only, however, and he began to speak again.

"You well know Paul Duval and Harry Chaptel who came to our Cycle, leaving living bodies behind them, have returned to those bodies, though I opposed them. You also know that Marguerite, who dared set her will against mine to give them time to escape, hangs a deadened soul

in an isolation barrier erected about her by our thought. But you do not know these two plan a return to our Cycle carrying with them the seeds of rebellion. You do not know this would never have been but for Tasmari."

Bari spat out the name as though hurling something venomous from his lips. Again as he stopped speaking the haze gathered about him, this time heavier, and did not entirely dissipate when he resumed speech.

"Tasmari knows I would bring a charge against her. Do you wonder she opposed this gathering?"

A tense silence fell on the host, broken at length by a voice which called, "In what has she erred?"

"She erred in bringing Chaptel to the Cycle."

"What error there?"

"She failed to require the usual control, and therefore failed in her duty. She also——"

"Is she to be charged without the chance to defend herself?" enquired one.

"She deserves no hear——"

Bari's voice was drowned by cries of "let her appear," "she is too high to be condemned like an ordinary soul—she is one of us."

Bari's face darkened in anger, but as the cries continued he motioned his arm in wrathful assent.

"You shall rue the day you crossed Bari," he shouted. "But now—— Tasmari! Tasmari! I, Bari, in my own right and in the name of the Council command you to appear. Let this thought seek you out wherever you may be; in the realm of the clean or in the place of the evil ones, yea, let it break down even your own powerful barrier of thought. Tasmari, you are commanded. Come!"

At the last word the haze dropped like a mantle about him. The figures on the seats swayed like reeds tossed by the blast of a hurricane. Only in the center and near the throne was there calm. On these seats the gathered souls were rigid in concentrated thought, their eyes boring into the now whirling mist on the platform.

In that mist two powerful wills struggled; thoughts strong as cosmic force lashed at each other, soundless and terrible in their strife. At times it seemed as though two figures, motionless as death, showed through it, then one, and sometimes the mist darkened like a lowering nimbus cloud. Only once was there a sound. From the haze came the clarion voice of Bari calling. "Souls of the Cycle, I command your minds to me!"

Instantly, among the seats, more and more souls sank into the dead calm of concentration. Faster and faster their numbers increased until all except the farthermost tiers were gazing stedfastly at the mist.

Suddenly it was over. The cloud lifted and Bari stood forth. With him was Tasmari, beaten but defiant.

"So Tasmari would take my place?" he muttered through clenched teeth. "You would add insubordination to your other failings? You forgot Bari controls the minds of the Cycle, my sister." To the concourse he shouted in a ringing voice, in which there was a hint of mockery, "Tasmari has come to defend herself!"

Something like a sob went through the concourse, except those who had first stood true to Bari. Then there was silence, with the eyes of all on Tasmari.

"We shall leave aside this attempt to overthrow your lawful ruler, for that is something which concerns us," this last significantly. "You were summoned to answer a more serious charge. Are you ready?"

"I am ready to meet any charge you may bring against me, my brother," she answered proudly. "What false accusation do you make now?"

"Nothing false. I charge you with the responsibility of the imminent invasion of our sacred Cycle, by forces from the Life Side, led by Paul Duval and Harry Chaptel."

"How am I responsible for that?"

Bari bent his eyes sternly on her.

"You brought Chaptel over here," he asserted.

"That does not make me responsible."

"No? Had he not come in, Duval would never have been freed from his isolation barrier. That is true, is it not?"

"Yes," she replied defiantly, "and had you not blundered in giving Marguerite the power of one of the Council, she could not have helped Chaptel, and all would be well."

"That could not be foreseen at the time the power was granted, and it does not mitigate your fault. The guilt is yours, Tasmari. You hated Marguerite, and you sought to embarrass her by bringing Harry Chaptel to this side, because you thought he also hated her. You were wrong. You exceeded your authority. Duval would still be in isolation had not Chaptel freed him. You admit that?"

"Yes," she conceded.

"No need to argue further. My charge is substantiated. With his release the danger commenced. The guilt is yours, and through you the evil which threatens us must be removed." His lips parted grimly. "If you know of no way, Bari will tell you."

"You are ever the fool, my brother," she stated simply. "With all you have said true," she went on, heeding not his angry glance, "we have nothing to fear. Do you not hold Marguerite?"

"What of that?"

"I *said* you were a fool. With her as hostage, do you think Harry and Paul will dare to move against us? Better isolation than the Vortex," she added with meaning.

"How do they know she is not in the Vortex, instead of isolation?"

"We can let them know through the instrument called the 'radio' by which Paul asked help of Harry. I have spoken through it, and know how."

Bari bent a grudging look of admiration on her.

"It may do. We shall see. Until we do you are not a free soul nor Queen of the Vortex, and besides, do not forget Bari demands satisfaction for what you tried to do to him."

"At your own time, my brother," she replied.

At the mention of Marguerite's name, a figure which had appeared quietly in the Temple came to the foot of the throne platform. He had waited in silence while Bari and Tasmari wrangled. As the latter turned haughtily, and half-triumphantly, away from Bari, her eyes fell on him. At the sight she started as though stung.

"What brings you here, Ratrim," she demanded quickly.

"Ill news for you and the Cycle, I fear," he answered. Tasmari's face, at these words, showed fear for the first time since she had appeared. Bari stepped forward, enquiry written on his face.

"Speak!" ordered Tasmari faintly.

"Who is this?" queried Bari.

"The guard over Marguerite's isolation," answered Ratrim for himself.

"What do you want?"

"I have a report to make."

"What is it?"

"As I watched at the barrier, a strange light seemed to play on it. The barrier began to disappear. I bent my will upon it, bidding it stay, still it melted. I called to the Council, but none answered. Then——"

"Then——?" exclaimed Bari and Tasmari together.

"Then it faded away and in an instant Marguerite had disappeared."

Bari turned slowly on Tasmari, who threw her arm before her face as though to shield her eyes from some horror.

"You see, my sister, what you now have to answer for," he muttered in a low tense voice. "While you would seize my power, Paul Duval, in some manner, broke Marguerite's barrier. It could be none other than he. Our guard's timely call which would have summoned us to his aid went unheeded because the Council poured their thought on me, to overcome your rebellion. Have you something to offer? Some scheme left in your fertile thoughts to regain the captive?"

She did not answer.

"Then it shall be my way. And you, Tasmari, one-time Queen of the Vortex, shall be the instrument to bring us victory."

"How may I do it?" fearsomely.

"This way," solemnly: "Duval has a friend, Carac. Carac is often with Duval and Harry, and they are about to let him know the results of their adventure here. He can approach them without suspicion. Now, if his body housed another soul—yours for instance, my sister—Carac might kill his friends, sending their souls into the Cycle, where Bari will deal with them this time."

"You mean—I must drive out his soul with myself? Taint my spirit body with the touch of flesh? That is too horrible."

"Either that or the Vortex for you," with grim finality. "Do you accept the task?"

Shaken to the depth of her spirit-soul, Tasmari hesitated. But fear of the unknown won over horror of the known.

"I accept," she agreed with a sigh.

2

The sick man stirred uneasily in a restless sleep. He had lain thus since early evening. At times he would spring bolt-upright in his bed, then sink back, muttering in his strange delirium. There had been intervals when the combined efforts of both nurse and physician had hardly sufficed to prevent him from leaping into the room.

The disease which was tearing the life from Carac, the great physicist, was not ordinary. Fever, which usually accompanies delirium, was not present. The face was not flushed, the breathing not unusual. The only symptom of sickness could be found in the beating of his heart, which alternately raced like an overspeeded motor and slowed to where the stethoscope could scarcely detect its feeble pulsations.

Clearly, the cardio-vascular specialist in charge of the case was baffled. The usual restoratives and stimulants seemed to have virtually no effect. The periods when the heart beat wildly were becoming fewer, those when the beats faded away, more prolonged. With the gaining of the slow over the fast, the periods of Carac's wild delirium, or terror, became more frequent, though weaker.

"If this keeps up much longer we'll have a dead man on our hands before morning," remarked the specialist, finally.

The nurse was silent. She knew that if anyone on earth could save Carac, it was the man who was attending him.

They continued watching their patient in silence. Outside, a clock in a steeple, which struck the quarter-hours, sent its silvery message to the sleeping city.

"Half past 3," muttered the doctor to himself.

The silent watch continued. The nurse busied herself about the room,

once in a while stopping to ease the invalid's position on his pillow, or busying herself with a hypodermic on the table by the bed. Outside, a dog set up a doleful howling. This continued for a time, then a window slammed open, there was a thud and a tinkle of glass breaking and the howling ceased.

The clock struck again.

"Quarter of 4," said the doctor.

The nurse came up behind him and laid her hand softly on his shoulder. As he turned his face up to her, she motioned him to silence. With her eyes she cautiously indicated the figure on the bed.

The doctor carefully turned and could scarcely restrain a start of surprize. Carac was stealthily watching him out of half-narrowed eyes. It was not this alone which had made the doctor start, however. As his eyes had met those of the patient, he had a momentary glimpse into the soul of the inferno. In those eyes were, strangely, horror and hate triumphant.

The expression passed in a moment. A little sheepishly the doctor leaned forward and gently patted Carac on the shoulder.

"Better, old man?" But Carac closed his eyes and the muttering began once more.

The doctor turned to find the nurse looking at him questioningly. He shook his head and they took up their vigil once more; this time a bit more on the alert. Somehow, both felt a new tension had entered in; a prescience of something to occur.

The clock was striking again.

One—two—three—four.

"Four o——" began the doctor, but his sentence was never finished. With a soul-paralyzing screech, Carac had launched himself from his bed. The doctor and the nurse darted toward him, but he shook the former off and dealt the woman a blow which sent her reeling, half-stunned, across the room.

With a curse the doctor again threw himself toward Carac,—then stopped in mid-rush. The sick man was standing at his full height, not violent now; head thrown back, every lineament of his face expressing untold agony and stark fear. Cry after cry burst from his twisted lips.

"You can't! you can't! you can't!" he screamed. His face became black and the sound came in half-strangled syllables from his throat.

Suddenly he wilted.

"All right! I'll go," he sobbed, and plunged face downward to the floor.

The doctor leaped to his side and turned him over on his back. The man slowly opened his eyes. They held the light of sanity, but glowed with a strange light, an inhuman quality.

"All right now, old man?" asked the specialist.

"Yes," huskily, and Carac closed his eyes and seemed to sleep. But in those eyes the doctor had half-sensed a subtle difference,—as though a new personality had entered, utterly unlike Carac.

3

It was a terrible night of storm. A night of moon and rain with the wind driving the harrassed clouds scurrying before it. Lightning flashed, jagged forks of it across the sky, and the thunder's answering growl had in it the quality of sound which made it seem a personal thing, a thing of menace.

With but one light turned on, Duval and I sat smoking silently, each busied with his own thoughts. The silence within was enhanced by the din without. Though it was warm in the room, I shivered slightly and noticed that Duval, one hand in his pocket, was slouched down in the up-

holstery of his chair, as though he, too, felt the dankness.

My revery was broken with a start. A low noise, like the beat of powerful wings, and a white ghost sailed into the study from the room beyond. I jumped half out of my chair, then sank back with a foolish half-laugh as I realized what had occasioned the disturbance.

A great white owl had flitted through the room and was now perched on the arm of Duval's chair. Duval always did the unusual, but one seldom chooses a fierce bird of prey as a household pet.

When I had surprized Duval a few nights back carrying the inert bird from in front of the ray machine, I had merely thought him engaged in some experiment. Since coming back from the Second Cycle, where the ray had sped us, he had occasionally used the machine, and against my protest. I did not like the idea of his opening the door to the Other Side. I could remember Tasmari's last words too plainly: "You win this time, but at the last you must return." I knew the returning would cause us some worry, and I was not eager to have it happen until we were prepared to defend ourselves.

Duval had tamed this owl to a certainty. After a moment's rest on the chair arm, it snuggled up to him and placed its head on his shoulder. He began to stroke the feathers under its throat, talking to it the while in a crooning voice.

The bird acted so humanly that I laughed, and then more loudly. It was too ludicrous to see the staid Duval and the sedate bird acting like two in love. At my laugh Duval drew his hand away for all the world like a little boy caught stealing jam, and the bird took its head from off his shoulder with a shy prettiness, laughably like a young girl caught in the act of caressing her sweetheart.

"What's so funny?" growled Duval.

"You and that bird," I replied. "Like two sweethearts."

Duval looked at me quizzically, but merely grunted in answer. I am not slow in putting two and two together and his expression should have told me something. It didn't—until later.

No more was said, for it was then that Carac came. He stood suddenly framed in the doorway. Whether he had just walked in, or had been admitted by Duval's man, we did not know. But there he was.

Coinciding exactly with his appearance, a black cloud shaped strangely like a man in flowing robes flung itself over the face of the moon, which, up to now, in spite of the storm, had miraculously kept her countenance clear. The room grew darker, and from that moment until Carac's mission was finished, I felt the presence of something malignant in the room.

Only that day, we had heard Carac was desperately ill, so we were naturally surprized to see him up and about, especially in a night like the present. A fine fellow, Carac, and one of our best friends.

"Well, come in, old man," called Duval, who was the first to recover from his surprize. "Thought you were on your back."

Carac came forward, somewhat uncertainly, and took Duval's outstretched hand. I extended mine. As I caught his fingers they were cold and clammy, like a dead man's, or a dead fish. His face, too, was colorless with the pallor of death. I let go his hand, which fell numbly to his side as though the effort of shaking hands had completely exhausted him.

Without a word, he walked gropingly toward a chair, stumbled over a rug and would have fallen, had not Paul caught him by the arm.

"By Jove! Carac! You *are* weak.

Why did you want to come out on a night like this?"

"Wanted to talk with you." These, the first words he had uttered, were thick, as though he had not the full control of the functions of his tongue.

"Couldn't wait, eh?" smiled Duval.

"Yes—er—no. Couldn't wait," he repeated, parrot-fashion.

"What is it about?" I asked.

He did not answer, but turned his eyes full into mine. I tried to meet his gaze, but somehow couldn't. There was a remarkable brilliancy, and a sort of stare in those eyes; behind that something else—something—something—I can not explain what it was save that it made me shiver to look at them.

When I looked down he turned his face to Duval, who returned the stare for a moment, but also looked away, laughing a little uneasily as he did so.

The silence was becoming embarrassing. Paul, who was not seated, took a cigar from the humidor, and bit off the end with a savage little twist. He struck a match and touched it to the end of his smoke.

Carac also helped himself to a cigar. Odd that I should have noticed it so clearly at the time, but Carac had never (and I knew him well) smoked cigars, preferring the cigarette. He, too, struck a match, carrying it shakily toward his face. It went out before a light could be secured, and he let the charred stick fall to his feet.

Duval absent-mindedly stooped to pick it up. In doing so, he half bent one knee, which kept his body nearly erect. His neck came on the level with Carac's hands.

From weakly hanging fingers, these were suddenly transformed into clutching talons. Carac's whole body tensed to spring, as those hands seemed to dart for Duval's throat.

With a startled exclamation, Duval eluded them by falling backward. I jumped to my feet, but Carac had sunk back into his chair, an apologetic, if sickly grin on his face.

Duval said nothing, but a thoughtful expression came into his face. Walking over to me he whispered, "I think he's delirious. Probably escaped from his nurses. I am going to call his home."

He was half-way across the room when Carac called.

"Don't go out. I feel better now, and I have something to tell you. Don't feel so strong and want to get back to bed." Duval hesitated but returned.

"I had a dream," he began. "In it I saw you and Chaptel here. I saw you in front of a machine of some kind which was projecting a powerful beam of strangely colored light. I saw your bodies fall to the floor of the room you were in, and your souls leaped free from their bondage of flesh."

Duval and I turned startled faces to each other. A dream? Except that we had not entered the Cycle together it was a fact. Carac continued as though not noticing our actions.

"Next, I saw you in a place strange to you. You were separated. Paul was enclosed in a strange-appearing substance, motionless. Harry was standing near. With him a woman. She was talking to him. Presently he fixes his eyes upon Paul. They become staring and concentrated. He slowly approaches you. You lift your hand. It drops by your side again. Harry is entering your prison. Then the woman fixes her eyes on you, Harry. In a moment you are both free and the woman has gone."

We were amazed. The man was recalling exactly the incident where I freed Paul from his isolation barrier while we were in the Second Cycle.

How could anyone on this side know of that? We had told no one. I looked questioningly at Paul, and saw a light of half-understanding in his face.

Carac continued: "Then I saw a mighty temple——"

"Stop," shouted Paul. "Do you mean to tell me you dreamed that?"

A peculiar smile twisted Carac's features, and he answered evasively, "That is not all the dream. There is more. When I next saw you——"

"That's enough, Carac," said Duval. "Harry and I know the rest. You could not know it unless——unless——"

Carac rose to his feet. "Just a dream," he smoothly interrupted.

Then his manner changed. It became more hard, less the attitude of a sick man.

"A few days ago you started an experiment to discover if, indeed, the soul did exist after death. I warn you to stop. To forget all you know about it, and to tell no one of what you learned. In this way only can you earn safety."

"*A few days ago!*" we cried in unison. Carac looked at us sharply, but did not reply.

"Why, that was five years ago," came from Duval.

Carac ran his hand over his face as though brushing something from his eyes. "Ah! I had forgotten Time exists here," he breathed in a voice so low I could not be sure what he said. Then aloud in stern demand, "Nonetheless, I command you to stop, in the name of——"

His voice died out in the middle of his sentence.

The white owl, which had sat as motionless as though stuffed in one corner of the room, had hooted dismally, and half flying, half hopping, came to rest beside Duval.

Carac had at first been startled, and now appeared half angry, as he saw what had made the noise. Suddenly a new expression came over his face, one of surprize, changing to understanding.

He glanced sardonically at Duval, then crouched and slowly, like a panther stalking its prey, crept toward the bird.

Duval and I, too astounded at the suddenness and unreality of it all for words, watched him, fascinated. The bird, as Carac approached, edged away from him, fear in its eyes, human fear. Merciful heavens! The eyes were those of a frightened girl!

Just in time Duval struck aside the arm which was shooting cobra-like at the owl. Instantly, Carac turned on him.

"Where did you get—that?" he asked in a tense voice.

"I——"

"No need to tell me, Duval—I know." He swayed toward Paul, deadly menace in every movement. But Duval did not stir. He was looking at Carac's face, which seemed subtly changed. It was the same face, yet somehow different. The eyes!—the eyes!—"windows of the soul" in truth.

"My God!" gasped Paul. "And I—know—you—Tasmari!"

Carac halted an instant, body tensed.

Now the explanation of things flashed upon me. Carac's uncertainty of motion because Tasmari could not control the muscles perfectly. Cigars instead of cigarettes because Tasmari did not know what Carac smoked. "A few days ago" instead of five years because Time did not exist in the Cycle and Tasmari would naturally not measure it on the Life Side. No wonder the face had suddenly became familiar to me—it was Tasmari looking out at us through Carac's eyes. Tasmari had driven out Carac's soul.

At the word "Tasmari" the tumult of the storm increased tenfold. There came a flash of lightning,

brilliant as a burning world—elemental sound engulfed us, and the lights in the room flickered and went out. I saw Carac leap.

Then faintly above the roar which the concussion left pounding at my ear-drums, came the sound of struggling beings, the stamp of feet and the impact of blows.

A moment later I had located the sound, and knew its cause. Tasmari, in the body of Carac, was attacking Duval. I leaped in and a flying fist caught me behind the ear with a force which stunned.

Duval's voice!

"Harry! quick, she's got a knife." Then came a moan of pain and an exultant cry from Carac. I groped my way to them again, fearful lest in the dark I should aid Duval's foe by mistake. I never reached my goal.

A light breeze fanned my face and something touched my cheek. There came a beating of wings and a scream of rage from Carac, which trailed off into a gurgling, sickening gargle. I heard the faint impact of a blow and a cry from the bird. A continued threshing of wings. Silence.

The lights came on. The circuit breaker which had been thrown by the bolt of lightning had been closed again. My eyes were met by a gruesome sight.

Duval was holding his shoulder, from which the blood oozed. Lying supine, head thrown back, was Carac, hate and life fading from his eyes. Fastened to his throat was the white owl, which had struck unerringly in the dark, when neither I nor Duval could see our foe.

Her wings were moving feebly, while in her white breast was a knife, to the hilt, around which was a slowly spreading stain.

Duval's eyes fell upon the bird. Still sunk in the ghastly wounds they had torn were its talons, but the white owl was dying. Paul crept over to the bird, gently took its claws from their reddened bed, and softly held it in his arms. There were tears in his eyes.

"Marguerite! Marguerite! Faithful unto death! Always my dear love!"

Then I knew what I might have guessed. Duval had given Marguerite an earthly shelter from Tasmari's wrath,—the body of a white owl!

At his words the bird raised its head and placed it on Duval's shoulder. For an instant it held on. Then fell back.

"Dead," sighed Duval. "Dead, and God protect her from those fiends in whose hands she has gone."

A choking sound from Carac. The lips were moving. I bent my head over them and caught these words: "Tasmari scores this time."

The eyes closed. At the same time the clouds were erased from the face of the moon, which once more flooded the room with its light.

Note.—The previous adventures of Duval were narrated in "Duval's Weird Experiment" and "Queen of the Vortex," in the April and May numbers of WEIRD TALES.

The Star Shell

A Weird-Scientific Serial

By GEORGE C. WALLIS *and* B. WALLIS

The Story So Far

HARRY WILLIAMSON, Mark Dexter and Prince Danda Singh, inspecting Dexter's space-ship, the *Star Shell*, are catapulted through space by the treachery of Professor Norden, who abandons the three on Europa (one of the moons of Jupiter). They are rescued by Jovian astronomers and taken to Jupiter, where Professor Norden has already landed with the *Star Shell*, but the party falls into the smoking ruins of a city that has just been captured by the Barbarians, and finds itself in the midst of the enemy.

CHAPTER 11

A FIGHT AGAINST FEARFUL ODDS

"MARK," said I, "this looks very much like the end of it all. The *Star Shell* is smashed, and we can't get back home. We have come a long way round to fall into the hands of a lot of savages. We could have stayed on the Earth and gone to Africa instead. But now we are here, we may as well make a fight of it and die game. It will suit me a deal better to go down here, fighting in the open air, on solid ground, than to face some of the other sorts of death we have been risking lately."

"Have you here any weapons?" Dandy asked the pilot.

"One fire-ray projector, charged for a few hours; that is all."

"Then for us is there hope yet," said the prince. "We have little weapons here that strange may be to the Barbarians. Over yonder seems dark, like the edge of a forest. Why not there let us try to reach?"

The Jovians glanced at each other, seeming to consult one another's unspoken thoughts, and then Delius said, in a sort of resigned-to-the-worst tone: "Let it be as our visitors wish. It may, after all, be possible; it may be better than immediate death."

So, though we knew our arrival had been noted by the Barbarians, who were running toward the smoking ruins from all directions, we opened the doors and stepped out of the stuffy little space-ship. Though we went to our death, yet it was a relief to be in the open. The air was breathable, though thicker and heavier than our earthly atmosphere. Huge gray masses of cloud obscured most of the stars, rifts in the rolling volumes of vapor now and then revealing the little satellite from which we had come. It seemed far more difficult to walk here than on Europa, or even than it does on Earth.

"My feet feel weighted down with lead," said Prince Danda.

"It is not to be wondered at, stranger," Delius observed. "Owing to the immense size of Jupiter, gravitation is two and a half times stronger than on your world. It does not seem quite so bad as that because Jupiter is turning so fast on its axis that the centrifugal force counteracts our weight to a certain extent. You will get used to it. What you will find more troublesome, I'm afraid, is the short day and night. As our planet turns round in less than ten of your hours, we have not quite five hours of darkness and not quite five hours of daylight. The night is already half gone."

"And here come your friends the enemy," said I. "This way, all of you; follow the shadow of the ruins."

Though we were strangers in a strange world, it never struck me till afterward that it was confounded cheek on my part to assume the leadership. But I knew what I wanted, and nobody else seemed inclined to start, so they all fell in under me, Jovians and Earthmen, without a word of protest.

The line of charred ruins I led them along went westward through the deserted maze of buildings, in the direction of the dark forest Dandy had pointed out. Beyond the outskirts of the sacked town lay a comparatively clear space of ground, the bulk of the Barbarians being encamped to north and south. If we could only win to the edge of the open, I argued, before daybreak, we might make a wild dash for liberty.

The shouting of the savages who were seeking us grew louder and nearer. They found the shell we had left before we had gone far, and presently, glancing back, we saw it gleaming through the darkness, a white-hot object enveloped in green flames. Scores of dark figures were dancing around it.

"The Green Fire!" exclaimed Oberon. "It is the Barbarians' one great invention. In the depths of their country they have mines of a green substance that burns more fiercely, more swiftly, than anything else of which we have knowledge. Nothing can resist it. But they are upon us! Have you the ray-projector ready, Delius?"

"Here, behind this low wall," I said, as Delius nodded. "This is a good place for the first stand. Wait till they are much nearer before you open out on them."

The rampart of the wall before us, the side of an undamaged house behind, and several alleyways for retreat, it was an ideal place to give battle.

Yelling, dancing, waving their weapons, brandishing smoking green fires in little metal baskets slung from poles, the Barbarian horde burst upon us. Already gloating over their victims, they tauntingly called upon the weaklings to come out and look death in the face. They were of a slightly larger type than the Jovians with us—rough, dark, hairy, muscular, with wrinkled faces and deep-sunken eyes. They carried swords and spears and wore but scanty dress or armor.

"Come out, come out!" they yelled, as they rushed down upon us. We understood them easily; it seemed there was but one language on all Jupiter. "Come out, weak ones, who shudder at blood; come out and taste of the Green Fire! We shall feed you with it—it shall make you strong!"

Our companions shivered, glancing at each other fearfully. The hands of Delius, as he lifted the tube of the Blue Ray to the top of the wall, trembled. I began to understand better why this civilized race was not master of the planet.

"Is it needful to slay them?" asked Oberon. "The end will be the same, whatever we do. Had we not better surrender?"

"Not if I know it!" I cried grimly. "I'm not built that way. Let them come, and we will give them such a surprize as they have never had before. Ready? One—two—*three!*"

We all stood up together and fired at close range into the scrum. I guess they got a shock. The mere sight of us three strange giants, shouting an unknown language, and shooting flashes of flame and smoke from our revolvers, must have been an eye-opener. We fired our automatics as fast as they would work, and the brutes fell in squirming

heaps. Delius plucked up courage and swept their front with the scorching Blue Ray. Screaming madly, shouting, shrieking, as the burning heat fell on them, the Barbarians recoiled.

"One to us!" I cried.

The three Jovians were silent, pale-faced. Even to save their own lives it hurt them to take other life, to inflict pain.

The Barbarians were tough, however, with the courage of brutes. They surged up to the attack again and again, a ferocious mob, attempting to fling their baskets of fire over our rampart. We gave them the same hot reception, and three times we hurled them back, howling and beaten, over the scores of their dead and dying. We stood up on the low wall, pumping lead into them; the Blue Ray burnt up the trodden grass and made the very ground smolder and smoke.

A long rest, another vain attack, and then the Barbarians drew off to a considerable distance, holding a sort of council.

"They are sure to try and take us in rear or flank, soon," said Mark. "How far is it across to the forest, Delius?"

"Three measures, Solitarian. And reading your thought, I can translate that into nearly six miles, as you reckon distance. It will be day soon, when you will see it for yourself. If we are fortunate, we may be able to seize some of the zemas before our intentions are discovered. Once in the Red Forest, we shall be safe, for no man ventures there of his own will."

"Zemas?" queried Danda.

"The fleet animals that are used throughout our planet for riding upon," explained Oberon. "For thousands of years they have been tamed in our service, tamed so well, indeed, that they answer to our thoughts of command. Very graceful and swift animals they are. When day dawns you will see herds of them on the plain. Yes, I understand; you have similar animals on your planet: you call them horses."

It was uncanny to have one's thoughts read like that, but we grew accustomed to the novelty in time.

"The sooner we get astride a few zemas the better, then," said I. "It is growing light over yonder, and judging by the sounds, our enemies are working round us."

As the dawn neared and the cloudy brightness spread from the east, we began to take stock of our chances. The Barbarians watching us in front seemed to be waiting for something, and the ruined town in our rear was buzzing with unseen activity. The light grew, things took shape, and we found that only a short, narrow lane separated us from the open ground and the herds of grazing zemas. Slender, antelopelike creatures these were, spotted like leopards.

"Time we were moving," I said. "Now is our chance or never."

And close on that, with a savage outbreak of cries that seemed to be an answer to my words, pandemonium broke loose. The Barbarians in front rushed once more to the attack, a headlong, death-defying mob; from every hole and avenue around, dark forms leapt into the light, and the house behind us became suddenly a roaring furnace of green flame.

No time for standing on ceremony! We gave them a salvo of bullets, a wild whirl of the Blue Ray, and then took to our heels, heading for the open. Under a shower of spears and arrows, we gained it, ran for the nearest group of zemas—the animals did not seem at all perturbed by us or by the noise—and mounted. They were not saddled, but their thick manes made excellent bridles for men in a hurry.

Well in advance of the frantic horde of enraged and surprized foes, we dashed across the plain, plunging

recklessly through the herds of grazing animals, on the way to what we Earthmen imagined to be safety.

Glancing over my shoulder, I saw a spear transfix our last man, the Jovian who had piloted us from Europa. He fell without a cry, dead. He was not a good runner, and had been the last man to secure a zema. It would have been committing suicide to turn back, so I didn't say a word to the others. We pressed on for all we were worth, and just in front of the yelling pursuit, ran into the shelter of the trees.

CHAPTER 12

THE FOREST OF THE GREAT RED WEED

For a mile more we urged our zemas on amongst the red-leaved trees of the forest, dodging the low branches and the hanging festoons of parasitic growth as best we could. Our lithe, spotted mounts seemed very sure of foot, but now rather slow in the going. I had scarcely formed the wish to halt, when my zema, with ears cocked forward nervously, stopped. The others halted at the same moment. There was no sign of pursuit; the cries of the baffled Barbarians had died away.

"It is out of that danger that we well are," said Dandy, jumping stiffly to the ground. "But I see not why they have allowed us to escape. They could us have here followed."

"It gets me, too," added Mark, looking enquiringly at our friends. "But we are one short! Where's what's-his-name?"

I told them, though I saw that the Jovians read the truth in my mind when I began to speak.

"It is well that Patio died quickly," said Delius. "For that we must be glad. Our own fortune may not be so good. We have escaped the Barbarians, strangers, but we are in the Forest of the Red Weed. I see that that does not trouble you yet—it will do so later. Even the zemas, you notice, are ill at ease, and do not wish to go farther. This great forest-waste is the most dangerous region on Jupiter. Here live all the fiercest brutes, the largest monsters, the venomous reptiles. Here dwell the big apes, the progenitors of our race. Even the Barbarians, who love the ordinary forests, dread this place because of the Red Weed."

"The Red Weed?" we asked.

"It is a wonderful plant, scientifically considered, but horrible in its nature. You see one over there, right in our path. Its huge, broad leaves, spiky and sword-edged, are of a blood-red color, and grow to the height of a man. It is omnivorous, eating other plants, any sort of animal that comes within reach of its poisoned spikes, or even men. At night it exudes a narcotic vapor that lulls its victims to a sleep that knows no waking. All over Jupiter this Red Weed grows, but both ourselves and the Barbarians have waged such war upon it that nowhere else but in this great waste does it flourish in such profusion or reach such a size. Something in the soil is favorable to its growth. And so our fiercest and weakest wild animals, avoiding man, find a refuge here."

"Well," said I, cheerfully, "we shall have to try and get through it somehow, and find a way of reaching your people."

"Quite so," answered Delius. "But we have before us a journey of more than 2,500 measures."

"Nearly 8,000 miles, Harry," said Mark, with the air of one who has made a great discovery. "The fact is, I knew about this place years ago—I've seen it many a time! It is oval in shape, 27,000 miles long and 8,000 miles across. Why, you can't pick up a book on astronomy without reading of the remarkable Red Spot on the planet Jupiter, and I have often put

my telescope on it. From 1878 to 1882 it was a much more vivid red than it has been ever since. And now we are in it!"

"Yes, about four of *our* years ago, the Red Weed flourished so luxuriantly that the night breezes from it poisoned thousands of people. Since then it has diminished greatly."

"But why must we go across this Red Spot?"

"Because the Barbarian lands adjoin it on east and west; and now that they have overrun the north, to go south is our only hope," was the Jovians' answer.

Eight thousand miles of forest to traverse on this strange world, a forest filled with all sorts of wild beasts! And with two human beings as companions who were too squeamish to kill anything if they could help it!

"Anyhow, let us make a start," said I. "In a year or two we ought to worry a way out. If there are wild animals, there ought to be game, and food."

The Jovians exchanged glances, and I wondered what was wrong, but nothing was said then. We ate some of the stale grub we had brought all the way from Earth, via Europa, eked out with a few tasteless tablets of concentrated proteid Oberon gave us, had an hour or two of sleep in an open space well away from any Red Weed, and then began our long journey.

It certainly had a spice of adventure about it, and had Mark and Dandy and I been alone, even in spite of the fact that we were on a strange world more than 350,000,000 miles away from home—and with little prospect of ever getting back—we would have entered into the fun of the thing. It was surprizing how quickly we had become accustomed to the extra gravitation, the denser atmosphere, the short days and nights.

The trouble began with the zemas. We said it would be easier and quicker to ride than to walk, much as the animals seemed to object to going on. Delius declared flatly, however, that we had no right to take the creatures into the forest to die, and he and his companion would not do so. Of course we couldn't ride off and leave them to follow on foot, we had to stick together; and so the zemas were let loose to go back to their Barbarian owners.

Then, a day or two later, we shot a fine animal of the bison type, but with only one horn on its forehead, and made ready for a good feed over the camp fire. The Jovians would not taste of the meat at any price, preferring their own proteid tablets and such edible plants as they could find. They even went out of sight whilst we had the first real square meal we had tasted for a long time. Prince Danda, remembering many of the doctrines of the Hindoo religions, was the only one of us influenced by the attitude of the Jovians.

"To us it seems most strange," said Delius. "The Barbarians eat the corpses of slain animals, even as you do, but we of the civilized race have long outgrown the degrading practise. We know that vegetable and chemical food is purer, more nutritious, less costly, does no violence to our finer feelings. We could no more bring ourselves to kill a fellow-creature for food than we could drink its blood. You are progressive; some day you will become a vegetarian race."

"And in the meantime, that bison steak was prime!" I retorted.

But we agreed to differ amicably, and each party to let the other follow its own ideas.

For some time we got on fairly well without meeting any of the horrors we were prepared for. There was lots of game and plenty of streams, so we had no lack of food

or water. Our avoidance of the Red Weed, both by night and day, became almost automatic. One morning we met a reptile about ten feet long—a scaly snake that waddled on short legs with ten-toed feet—and trouble seemed brewing, as it could waddle faster than we could run. But Oberon had sense enough to give the nightmare a taste of the Blue Ray, and it suddenly remembered a pressing engagement elsewhere.

And then I tumbled right into the thick of the excitement. We had to be careful of our cartridges, so when we sighted game we spent a good time trailing it to make sure of a dead certain shot. For about a week of Jovian days after we had seen the walking snake, the texotis—as our friends called the one-horned bison—had been rather scarce. Mark and I were out after a fine specimen one evening, all the others being in camp, and though unsuccessful near sunset, we decided to try for it a little longer. We separated as the texotis shambled down a curving valley, Mark taking a short cut to try and send him back to where I waited.

Evidently the texotis quickly got wind of my companion, for he turned in his tracks and came back, charging full tilt at me before I expected him. With his one horn lowered, and snorting defiance in his desperation, he was an awkward customer to face. If only we had got those repeating rifles out of the *Shell* before Norden turned traitor!

I fired twice—but what use were revolver bullets fired in a hurry against that charging mountain of solid flesh and shaggy hide? He didn't even blink. There was nothing for it but to get out of his way—if I could.

I jumped aside when he was nearly on me—I could not jump far because of the clumps of Red Weed that grew around the spot—and he went blundering past. Right through a mass of the deadly red foliage he plunged, bellowing, and suddenly disappeared. At the same moment, before I had time to save myself, the ground gave way beneath me and I followed the texotis down a slithering, gravelly slope.

Clutching wildly at anything that came handy, and yelling for Mark at the top of my voice, I went rolling into the deep pit that had been hidden from me before by the fringing growth through which the animal's charge had carried him. The crumbling edge had given way under his weight, dragging me down as well.

It was lucky that I fell upon a soft bed of moss at the bottom, for the last three yards of the drop were over a ledge and almost vertical. When I struggled to my feet, bruised all over, I didn't like the look of things at all.

The roughly circular pit had steep sides, nowhere less in depth than the fifteen feet where I had tumbled in. Not much chance of climbing out. It was filled with clusters of luxuriant Red Weed, and bushes of Red Weed fringed it round. Somewhere amongst the undergrowth the texotis was tramping about and bellowing, searching for me in his implacable fury. It was nearly night; already it was dark in the pit. And after sunset the Red Weed would fill that round hollow with the poisonous vapor of death!

CHAPTER 13

THE CANNIBAL APES

THE worst about it all was that I was alone. Company gives everyone a sort of courage. What had happened to Mark? Why hadn't he answered my call?

Just as I asked myself that, I heard the crack of his revolver, and a quickly stifled cry. That was all. Desperate with anxiety, I began clawing at the steep, slippery slope. The

friable soil gave way beneath me every time I put my weight upon it. I gained a few inches, by frantic efforts, only to fall back as far next moment. At last I got hold of an exposed root—a root of the Red Weed—and pulled myself a third of the way up. Another couple of lifts like that, I said, and I might be out of the pit before the night filled it with poison. Already it was so dark that I could not see objects very clearly.

And then, as I made another leap, glancing upward, I saw a trio of grinning heads hanging over the ledge of the pit. They were the heads of hairy, apelike creatures, tall as earthly men. They gibbered and mowed at me, opening and shutting their projecting jaws, and then, seeing that I hesitated, one of them stretched down a long, muscular arm, holding out the broken branch of a tree for me to grasp.

The act seemed friendly enough, but his gloating expression gave me a sickly feeling. Yet I could not very well disdain that helping hand. Anything, I thought, would be better than dying alone in the pit of the weed. I looked down—to see the dim form of the texotis, mad with rage and pain from his struggles amongst the spiked foliage, waiting for me with lowered horn.

There was no help for it. I grabbed the stick and was jerked up to safety by the big ape. He and his companions peered at me in the dim light, grunting curiously, and then my captor swung me under his arm as you might carry a parcel, and set off at a shambling pace down the valley. The sun was just setting, and two pale moons rode in the cloudy sky.

About half a mile down, the trio stopped in a clearing and were joined by a fourth companion, who lifted from the ground and carried something in the way I was carried. It was Mark! I could not see his face as we hurried along in the darkness, but our captors made no effort to stop our talking.

"Glad you're alive, old son," I said, the lurching gait of my bearer jerking the words out of me erratically. "I heard your shot. Did you get one of them?"

"No, Harry, I missed—and a good thing, too, or I believe they would have torn me to pieces. I got a knock that sent me silly, and then I woke up to see you being toted along. How did they collar you? You yelled hard enough."

I told him my little adventure, and by the time I had finished, the giant apes had reached their lair. It was a shallow cave in a sandy cliff at the top of a barren slope. They dumped us down as though we were mere logs, and squatted round us, chattering and gesticulating, two of them striking their breasts with their clenched fists so that the night seemed throbbing with the beat of drums. Presently two more came and joined the circle, and then another couple.

"An interesting sort of animal charivari," said I, "but what's the idea? How long is the serenade going on?"

I had an uncomfortable suspicion of the truth, but Mark's reply sent a cold shiver of horror down my back.

"They are only waiting for daybreak, Harry. These are cannibal apes: Oberon told me of them. They eat their own dead, and any Barbarians or civilized men who fall into their clutches. Breakfast is their great meal of the day. When the sun rises we are done. I'm sorry I ever made the *Star Shell.*"

"It is Norden we have to thank for this," was all I felt capable of saying.

It was an awful experience—that waiting, helplessly, to be knocked on the head and chewed up by these grunting, drumming horrors. We thought of Dandy and the two Jo-

vians, camping in the forest; of all our friends far away on the Earth; of Professor Norden, safe and sound amongst the civilized people of this strange planet. Would any of them ever know our fate? It was sickening—to have come all this way to die like this—to have achieved a journey such as no other men had ever attempted—and to end as meat for a band of chattering apes.

The short night passed all too quickly. The east began to glow with pale light. The brutes fell silent, looking at their leader, the big old man with the gnarled club.

He got up, walking clumsily on his hind legs, and eyed us both earnestly, much as a purchaser looks over the joints in a butcher's shop.

"It will be your turn first, Harry," groaned Mark. "You have most fat."

"Might as well have a fight for it, Mark," said I. "They haven't troubled to take our guns. Directly he starts the club act, I'm going to make trouble."

The old man picked on me right enough, and swung the big lump of wood in hefty style. I ran in and gave him a dose of lead plumb center, and another, for luck, in the head. He let out a forty-horse-power yell and went down in a heap, nearly knocking me over with his long, whirling arms.

"Back to the wall!" I shouted to Mark. "It will soon be over."

And it would soon have been over, I knew that. They were seven to one, and foaming with rage at the death of their leader. We might have shot two or three more in the scrimmage, but without help our number was called.

I was never more thankful for anything in my life than for the shot that answered mine, and the shout that followed. Another of the great apes fell, screaming horribly, and Dandy was crying: "Lie down flat, you two; quick be!"

We threw ourselves down, and the fierce Blue Ray, emerging from the twilight depths of the forest, swept over us. As its burning, searing beam struck the six apes they yelled in pain and terror, smoke rising from their scorched hide. They took to headlong flight. We were saved.

CHAPTER 14

THE INVISIBLE AIRSHIPS

THE sun rose and we got up and went to meet our friends.

"It was a call most close—it was at the moment last," said Prince Danda. "We had great difficulty in the tracing of you, and trouble to approach you without the warning of our coming giving to the apes. But we here are, and all well is, and—and—and——"

"And what in thunder's that?" we cried.

Something strange, scarifyingly mysterious, had passed, and yet nothing that we could see. It began with a growl from the south, a growl that quickly became an increasing roar. It went over us, just about the level of the treetops, with a shrill, demoniac scream that for the moment deafened us. The foliage was beaten hollow in its track as though a gigantic plow had ripped across the forest. The blast of its breath made us stagger, almost threw us to the ground. It died away in a deep, prolonged moan. But nothing visible had gone by.

"What on Earth—I mean, what on Jupiter—was that?" we asked.

"I ought to have warned you that we were near the zone of the intercontinental air-lines," replied Delius. "That was one of our express airships, driven by magnetism."

"But we saw no ship at all!" cried Prince Danda.

"It was not to be expected," was the answer. "Our long distance airships travel at the rate of—I am using your standards of measurement—nearly two thousand miles per hour."

We gasped.

"Give us a chance—give us a rest!" I said. "Get down to something easy. After being nearly made into breakfast, it is time we had some food ourselves—we need it."

The dry, sandy cave seemed a good camping place for folks requiring rest and safety, and we decided to stop there till the following day. The ground was high, and no Red Weed grew near. One of us on guard, with the Blue Ray, would suffice to keep away all intruders.

Mark, after examining the projector of the ray, and learning all about it in a lot of scientific jargon that was above me, kept asking questions about the invisible airships—how many people did they carry, could the crew see where they were going, had they wireless on board, etc.

"In fact, Solitarian," said Delius, smiling, "your thoughts are running on a way of escape from this forest. You do not like the idea of groping along, in daily and nightly peril, for months, perhaps years. Neither do we, especially as the Red Weed grows more thickly toward the center. As you rightly imagine, all our airships carry wireless apparatus to keep the passengers in touch with the rest of our world, and the metal of the vessels can be made transparent at will."

"Then they may have seen us, and help may be coming?"

"If the vessel that just now passed went by so quickly that you could not see it, strangers," said Delius, "it was, of course, going too fast for its crew to see us at all distinctly. They might, perhaps, catch a momentary glimpse of what they would imagine a group of apes. I do not see how any help can come to us, or any news of us reach our people. We can not read thought at a distance; we can not make any kind of wireless apparatus without materials or tools."

"There is nothing for it, Mark, but to plug along," said I, resignedly. "It is rotten luck. We shall all have gray hair when we work our way out of this confounded Red Spot—if ever we do work out."

CHAPTER 15

THE GIGASAURS

WE STARTED the following morning, in no very cheerful mood, as anyone can well imagine, to face that 8,000 miles of poisonous weed and strange animals. It was a great come-down for space-travelers who had jumped the empty gulf between the Earth and Jupiter, to have to toil along on foot.

We asked our friends if their airships ever stopped en route.

"Never," said Oberon. "The only thing that could stop them on the journey would be an accident, a failure of the magnetic circuit aboard—and few such accidents have occurred in my lifetime."

He spoke rather boastfully, and I reflected that "pride goeth before a fall." And it did, in more ways than one, the very next day—and fortunately for us, terrible though the disaster was in itself.

Early that morning, soon after we had reached the bank of a wide, swift stream, the forest on our left hand was filled with a sudden hurricane of noise, of screaming and trumpeting. It was as though a great storm were sweeping across the land, breaking the trees, shaking the very ground. Scores of texotis broke from cover and sought the water; groups of chattering apes, huge reptiles that waddled on feet, and other strange

beasts, came out of the undergrowth. They crowded together in the rocky shallows, and none of them seemed to take any notice of us. They were in the grip of fear. The uproar grew, spread, drew nearer.

"Gigasaurs!" cried Oberon. "A herd of them, coming to the river. You have animals similar to them—you call them elephants."

"If those elephants are," said Prince Danda, with jungle memories in his mind, "it is a fix we are in. The herd on the march is resistless, and we are between them and the water they seek."

"Then we had better step on the gas," I said. "The river comes through a narrow place up there, judging by the sound of a fall, and it may be too tight a squeeze for the brutes."

We hustled along as smartly as we could, but it was rough going, and the extra gravitation told on us. Our progress was also impeded by the mob of scared wild animals that kept getting in our way. The deafening noise of the advancing herd grew stronger.

We were still in the open, racing for the shelter of the rock-strewn narrow gully at the foot of the waterfall, when the gigasaurs burst into view. There were scores of them, huge, unwieldy brutes, twice the size of an elephant. They carried long, sharp tusks, but had only short trunks. The forest behind them—trees and bush and Red Weed alike—was trampled flat, as though a great steam-roller had been forced through it.

The foremost animals caught sight of us, and took a positive dislike to our appearance at once. Screaming and trumpeting, shaking the ground with their ponderous feet, they rushed for us at the speed of a racing horse. We dashed on frantically over those few yards of open. No use wasting revolver bullets on those leather skins.

As the others plunged into the shade of the narrow gully, I tripped in a tangle of creeper, and fell, right in the track of the nearest gigasaur. With a shrill peal of triumph he bore down upon me. Struggling to my feet and trying to free myself, I realized that I could not get out of his way. I thought my time had come.

I have given you a bad impression of the Jovians, I am afraid, but I was now to have proof that they did not lack courage—and courage of a very high order, more in Mark's line.

Oberon was the only one who noticed my fall in time, and he acted promptly. He ran back, stood over me, and with the Blue Ray projector poised, waited for the oncoming brute. Waited, risking his life to save me—and all the time his teeth were chattering, his knees shaking, and he was pale with fear.

Luckily, the intense heat of the Blue Ray, concentrated on the gigasaur's face, proved too much for the moving mountain. With a fierce snort he swerved off to cool his heated brow in the stream. So close was the call that his nearest footprint made a deep hole in the turf not a yard from where I fell.

"That was real grit, old chap," I said, as we stumbled onward to the safety of the rocky ravine. I had to help the plucky astronomer along the last bit, so scared and shaken he was.

We were not a moment too soon. My pursuer, having cooled his forehead, set up a terrific trumpeting, and came after us. The rest heard him, knew what he wanted, and followed. It was impossible to go up the waterfall; the sides of the gully were too steep to climb, besides being full of snakes and apes and topped with bushes of Red Weed; and those accursed gigasaurs blocked the way we had come. Fed, and with plenty of water at hand, those cunning mon-

sters actually made camp and waited for us!

"The gigasaurs are noted for keen memories and revengefulness," said Delius. "They will wait a long time now that they have got the idea fixed in their heavy brains."

We had not much left to eat, no chance of game, and few edible roots grew here. It looked very awkward, and then fortune—or rather, misfortune—came to our relief.

CHAPTER 16

THE STORM

About noon a low growl, an increasing roar, came from the north. Another aerial express, we said, tightening up our nerves for the tornado of its unseen passage; but the noise changed as suddenly as it began, became a long-drawn shrieking hiss, and something visible fell slanting from the sky. It struck the ground near the river bank, throwing up dust and stones, and scaring the gigasaurs backward a few yards. It was a long vessel, shaped like a torpedo. Its nose was buried in the ground, its back was broken right across.

"An accident!" cried Delius; and heedless of the mystified animals, we rushed to the scene.

I won't go into details. The air-vessel had carried a crew of four, and ten passengers. They were all dead, killed by the terrific shock of the fall. The inside of the broken vehicle was a shambles.

"It is terrible, this accident, but it brings us help," said Mark. "When the ship fails to arrive at its destination, your people will surely investigate."

"We must have help sooner than that, and more certain," was the answer of Delius, after inspecting the apparatus in the least damaged part of the wreckage. "According to this weather indicator there is a storm raging in the center of the Red Forest. The river may be in flood before morning. Thank the Great Spirit, Solitarians, that the wireless remains in working order. Now I can talk to my friends, and help will reach us not later than the dawn."

He was busy tapping the sending key of the aerial for several minutes, quickly getting an answer, and he kept on as long as possible, though we warned him that the gigasaurs were recovering from their fright and edging nearer.

At last we had to leave the wreck and seek the shelter of the gully once more. A couple of monsters then approached the airship, nosed round it, trampled on it, and finally, getting their huge tusks under it, levered the bigger portion into the river. Then they settled down again to wait.

"I spoke to my father and wife in the city Nadir," Delius told us. "An airship will be despatched for us as soon as a spare one can be found. They were surprized to hear from me, imagining that we had all perished at the hands of the Barbarians. The Barbarians, I am sorry to tell you, have had great successes. They are led by skilled generals. They are near the Isthmus of Cardiac, and once they pass that, the main civilized continent lies open to their advance, with our cities, Zenith and Nadir. Not for two hundred years has the Isthmus of Cardiac been in peril."

"Perhaps, if you were to give us a free hand in the fighting—let us show you how to use your scientific knowledge—we might help you," I said.

The Jovians exchanged glances, and shook their heads, but Oberon remarked: "I wonder. It may be that if we were less humane, less peaceful, we should have more peace. I wonder."

What we began to wonder about in real earnest, even before sunset, was whether we should be alive when help came. The storm broke upon us

with a fury unequaled by anything I ever experienced on Earth. The lightning was a constant blaze of dazzling radiance; the thunder rolled and roared in a continuous volume of sound that made speech impossible; the rain fell in a solid sheet of water, drenching us in a few minutes, bending the stoutest trees; the wind, had we not been in a sheltered nook, would have blown us away like thistledown before a summer gale. Only the gigasaurs, swaying slightly before it, the rain pouring off their hides in cataracts, stood their ground stolidly.

Toward morning the fury of the storm abated and the rain ceased, but a new danger threatened. The river, fed from the water-logged valleys higher up its course, began to swell. The fall spread, thickened, the stream below it widened, encroaching on the narrow space on either side. Trees, boulders, masses of soil and brushwood, the carcasses of animals, were shot over the cascade. The current became a roaring, raging mass of angry foam, visibly widening every moment. Backward and backward to the unclimbable cliffs we were forced, till the flood was at our feet. Below, in the open, waited the herd of gigasaurs. And there was yet, though dawn tinged the sky, no sign of aid.

CHAPTER 17

THE CITY OF TAPERING SPIRES

HIGHER and higher rose the flooded river, rushing over the top of the fall in a solid mass of mud-brown water. It splashed our feet, covered our ankles. We were desperate, on the point of dashing out of the gully and risking the attentions of the gigasaurs, when the airship came, just after sunrise.

The torpedo-shaped vessel swooped down toward us, hovered, and from an opened door amidships let down a light steel ladder. One by one we scrambled up. The ladder was drawn in, the door closed. The airship lifted higher, circled once round the spot, and then put on full speed. Through the transparent metal walls we had a fine view of the land—a land covered with masses of dark brown forest and flaming Red Weed—of the flooded river, and the herd of gigasaurs.

Then, as Jupiter's magnetism seized us in its compelling grip, the forest slid away beneath us, rushing along like a tinted blur. At two thousand miles an hour there was nothing definite to be seen.

"Good-bye to the Red Spot!" we cried, fervently.

The crew of the ship were four only, and there was plenty of space for us in the big room that filled most of the hull. The magnetic motors were out of sight in cabins fore and aft. The Jovians had evidently heard a lot about the Earth and the *Star Shell* from Professor Norden—who, we gathered, had now recovered from his rough landing—and accepted us at once as friends and equals. And when we told them of our experience in the Red Forest, they looked upon us with admiration.

"It was a terrible time for you all," said Ardis, the captain of the ship. "I am glad I reached you when I did. But I am not sure that in coming with me you are not running into peril even worse. As our wireless will tell you, the Barbarians have had great victories. They have learned how to discharge the Green Fire from huge catapults, and once their blazing missiles fall within our forts, the very stones crack and flame. The Green Fire is radio-active; it loosens the atomic energy of matter. Already the enemy are upon the Isthmus of Cardiac, and once they pass it, the city Nadir, the Gate of the West, is at their mercy."

"On our planet," said Mark, "we should not rest on the defensive; we

should attack the Barbarians and cow them into submission. With such a weapon as your Blue Ray, used properly, and a few hints we could give you of our weapons, this could be done. Then the planet would be yours, not theirs."

"*We* shouldn't stand any nonsense," said I; and went on to tell them how we on Earth had dealt with Afghans, Indians, Matabele, Sudanese and others.

"Yours is indeed a bloody history," said Delius, shuddering, "and yet, have we not been in a state of war for centuries? I am afraid there is something in what these strangers say, my friends. It may be that we shall have to lay aside our scruples in order to win a lasting peace."

"There are some in the Great Council who think so," said Ardis. "Tomorrow will be held a most momentous meeting, and the Solitarians will be asked to be present—all excepting Norden. His thoughts have been read, and we know that he is an evil man. He has cast eyes of desire on Briseis, our Queen-Elect; he has been discovered conferring secretly with Barbarian prisoners."

"He has turned out worse even than we thought," said Dandy. "He a prisoner should be. Has he drunk been?"

The Jovians looked at each other furtively, coughed, and actually blushed. Oberon took Mark aside, and speaking with difficulty, informed him that Professor Norden had obtained an intoxicating drink from one of the prisoners.

"Fact is, you fellows," whispered Mark to us, "he has been making an ass of himself with the booze. The Barbarians are as bad as humans for the drink, whilst the civilized race are so horrified at the idea that they flinch from mentioning it. It is not considered a fit subject of decent conversation."

"My stars!" I grunted. "We shall have to be very careful how we talk to these refined folk. They don't eat meat, they don't imbibe beer, they don't kill anything except in self-defense—and then it hurts them. And yet, somehow, I rather like them."

"Same here," added my companions.

The airship, after its swift journey, was slackening its speed. Soon the ground below ceased to be a blur, a streaked gray road, and we saw that we were descending in a long, slanting course over an isthmus between two continents. To north and south lay limitless expanses of silvery sea; below us land stretched out, widening every moment as we left the isthmus behind. Fifty miles inland, as our great momentum spent itself, we dropped gently down toward the glittering spires of a city.

It was a wonderful sight, that city of tapering spires, the city Nadir, at present the capital of the civilized race.

It covered a big area, every house standing in a luxuriant garden of foliage and fruit trees, and gay with flowers; the roads were wide and gently curving highways of a smooth gray substance, busy with auto vehicles of many sorts. No smoke hung in the clear air. As we neared the landing stage—a broad space marked out in geometric lines—and threw the door open, a confused murmur of traffic, mingled with the songs of birds, came up to meet us.

"After the satellite Europa, and the Red Forest, this indeed heaven is!" exclaimed Dandy.

A shout of delight burst from Mark as the airship settled down to its moorings. He pointed to a familiar object not fifty yards away."

"The good old *Star Shell!* We must have a look at her before we run round the city."

We felt comforted, somehow, by the sight of the vehicle that had car-

ried us through the hundreds of millions of miles of space. It was a product of the dear old Earth. It was true we found it broken—cracked from base to apex—but a number of Jovian mechanics were at work upon it already, slowly closing up the fissure, joining the metal walls, fusing them together with a portable electric welding outfit.

"Another day of work, stranger," said one of the mechanics, looking up from the operation, "and your spaceship will be repaired and ready for travel. You must have great courage, to risk so fearful a journey. With us, the journey to Europa seems terrible, and only a few of the astronomers, mad for scientific knowledge, can be found to dare it."

He had spoken as though we were old friends. The wireless had spread the knowledge of us everywhere, it seemed, and these queer people were true gentlemen. Though they must have been very curious about us, they never pressed us with too many questions, and throughout the whole of our stay on Jupiter we were never bothered by crowds of open-mouthed wonder-gazers—as men from Jupiter would have been followed and stared at in the streets of our planet.

On our part we were inquisitive enough, and gladly accepted an invitation to a joy-ride through the city of spires. We were shown the public squares, the baths, the factories where people worked to the strains of music and amongst gay floral decorations, the municipal offices where the supply and demand of all goods and services were regulated, the theaters, and—oh, yes, they have had motion pictures on Jupiter for hundreds of years!—the cinemas, where we saw wonderful pictures in stereoscopic relief, rendered in all the perfect coloring of nature, and with every accompaniment of natural sound.

"If we can only get the secret of these pictures to take back to Earth, that alone will make the trip worth while," said Mark. "And now, what next? I am beginning to enjoy myself at last."

That was what we all felt. We had been through a nerve-racking time, and it was a treat to look on the easy side of things for a change. But we were given little opportunity for mere enjoyment. The Jovian days are short, and no time can be lost if anything is to be accomplished between sunrise and sunset. Delius conducted us to a guest-house, where we had hot baths and good suppers, and were put to bed in swinging hammocks.

(Have I forgotten to mention that the climate of Jupiter, but for the truly terrific storms, is delightful? Though the giant planet is such a long way from the sun, it is kept warm by its own internal heat and the heavy clouds that retain much of the heat. The weather was always that of a mild summer's day.)

"In the morning," said Delius, when he left us in the hall of the guest-house, "you will be summoned to a meeting of the World Council. You have come at a great crisis in our history, with experience from another planet, and our Elders will listen eagerly to your ideas."

CHAPTER 18

THE STOLEN QUEEN

"WE ARE right in the thick of things here," said I, as we entered the council chamber in the great state palace next morning. It was a large room, its center open to the sky. "Fancy insignificant fellows such as we are on Earth, being invited to an all-Jupiter conference! And here's our uninvited pal, Professor Norden—and here is the Queen-Elect. Beautiful, I would say."

Norden strolled in and took a seat in the back row, nodding to us curtly. Evidently he had been well

treated by these over-civilized folk, and in spite of his dreadful habits and his treachery, they allowed him perfect freedom. There was a strained, tense expression on his face, however, quite unusual to him. We wondered at the time, but now we know what it meant. He was trying to control his thoughts, to hide the new mischief at the back of his mind.

But the Queen-Elect, Briseis! I am not much at describing women. It seems they like to have a sort of queen over them on Jupiter, though the civilized race is virtually a free republic, and so every year they elect the finest woman they can find. And finest, with them, means the finest in every way. Briseis, we were told, was the most beautiful, the most physically perfect, and at the same time the best educated, the most brainy and best-willed woman on the planet. She had been elected twice, and with her clear-cut features, ivory skin, dark hair and violet eyes, she looked every inch a queen.

"It is most wonderful here to be," said Dandy. "But when it is over, then to Norden I shall talk strongly!"

The queen came to the state chair and lifted her hand. An instant silence fell on the council of white-haired Elders, and she spoke. It was the most businesslike palaver I have ever been in. No one talked too long, and everyone kept to the point. There were no silly formalities.

"You all know my views, people," said the queen. "I am for the use of unrestricted force. I think our old scruples must go, if we would preserve our race. You, Ostrong, our eldest councilor, will put the other side before us, and then the spokesman of these strangers, these daring visitors from the planet Solitaire, shall speak of their experience."

A fairly tall old man, straight of back, rather shifty of eye and shaky of voice, his head a mop of silver-gray, then stood up. This was Ostrong. Somehow, I didn't cotton to him.

"Elders of Jupiter," he said, "you know my views also. I believe in the old ideas of kindness and mercy. I would long ago have sent home these prisoners you are still keeping near the city. I would still rely on the justice of our cause, on self-defense alone. That One Whom we worship, Who has preserved our people through past centuries, will preserve us yet. Let us trust in Him. Let us keep our souls clear of the guilt of shedding innocent blood. Better even to die with untarnished honor than to live at the cost of death and pain to an inferior race. I have spoken."

"Now it is up to you," I whispered, pushing Mark forward. "You are the one to face this sort of music."

This was another case where Mark scored. In front of this calm, sedate assembly of senior wranglers, where I should have felt all the courage oozing out of my boots, he was quite at home.

"Friends," he said, "I believe, as sincerely as you do, in mercy and loving-kindness. I have no desire to kill or injure any living creature needlessly. The best of us on our planet feel like that."

A long, deep murmur of approval from the old gang.

"But," went on my wonderful pal, "on Earth we have a knack of facing realities. We don't see any sense or justice in allowing inferior or savage races to overrun our planet. We think that self-defense includes judicious attack. We prefer a wholesale dose of war now and then, giving us long times of peace, to a constant state of terror. Were this the Earth, and were we of the civilized race, we should make such an onslaught upon the Barbarians that they would not dare to annoy us for a century."

Great applause from the younger element in the council.

"As the civilized race, it is your duty to spread the benefits of civilization over the whole of the planet," pursued Mark, warming to his subject. "Cities and fruitful lands such as this should spread over the whole surface of your globe. The Barbarians should be subjugated, educated by force if need be, exterminated if need be, in the true interests of future generations. It may seem presumptuous on my part, but though we are not so far advanced as you in some ways, I must say that we are more so in others. We can show you methods of destruction that will roll back the Barbarian waves and make you forever secure and dominant. If you will allow us, we will help you."

A scene of enthusiasm followed. It was evident that the new ideas were gaining ground. After more speeches a vote was taken. Every councilor had a small black ball, which he was allowed to drop into one of two glass vessels that were handed round. One vessel was marked "For defense only;" the other, "For attack." Each vessel had an indicator attached, that automatically registered, at any moment, the number of balls within. Delius, after a glance at the two vessels, as they were placed on the table in front of the queen, turned to us excitedly.

"Never have so many of the Elders voted for strong action before!" he cried. "The numbers are equal! The queen has now to cast the deciding vote."

"And she is a woman of sense," said I. "There is no doubt about the result. It looks to me, Mark, that we shall have to get busy soon showing them how to make T. N. T. and long-range guns, and similar triumphs of human progress. Now for the final score."

But that casting vote was never to be given. A shadow fell across the open chamber as an airship sailed slowly over, trailing a fine-meshed net above our heads. Two shots rang out, and the two glass vessels were shattered to fragments, the voting balls spilling on the floor. The queen, in the act of stretching out her hand, gave a startled cry and stepped back in surprize and fear.

"Norden!" shouted Mark. "Hold him!"

The professor, with smoking revolver still in his hand, was at the queen's side before we could reach them. We feared the worst, though Ostrong appeared to be supporting her. In the rush and confusion everybody was in everybody's way, and nobody expected what happened.

The net swinging over our heads fell suddenly and enveloped the Queen. Ostrong, making a pretense of freeing her from its folds, actually drew them closer around her, and Norden managed to pull up the tightening cord before we could reach him. The net was then hauled aloft, and Norden made a spring to go up with it, but I prevented that. I gave him a jolt under the left ear that put him out of action for a spell. He went down like a felled ox, and people gasped.

But the queen, struggling uselessly in the net, was whisked up and drawn into the airship. We had a glimpse of two grinning Barbarians in the doorway of the vessel before the opening was closed and the vehicle sped away eastward.

Ostrong and others shouted orders for instant pursuit. There was a rush for the exits, and then, right across the mêlée, night fell, though it was midday.

"Only an eclipse," said Mark, glancing at the sky. "The first satellite has sailed between us and the sun, that's all. I expect the queen-stealers timed their coup with this in mind. Ah, the lights are on; that's better. It's a bad business."

"Yes, and there are others in it besides Norden," said I. "Ostrong's in it or I'm a Dutchman. I can't read thought, but I can read faces, and that old hypocrite has given himself away. He is a fanatic for the old ideas, and he has used Norden and the Barbarians as his tools. It was a trick to prevent the council coming to a decision. No doubt he had canvassed them all and knew how the vote would go."

"If it for him had not been," said Dandy, "the queen would have escaped the net. I was him watching."

We told Delius and Oberon our suspicions. We were now all out of doors, looking at the last phase of the passing eclipse. Half a dozen airships were rising into the gloomy sky.

Our friends shook their heads.

"It is hard to believe in such treachery," said Oberon. "Of course Ostrong has the power of concealing thought, but we read nothing of such intention in his mind. And now, you see, he is active in organizing pursuit; he also demands a searching enquiry into the terrible affair. If we were a vindictive race, Solitarians, it would go hard with your evil comrade. Our queen is very dear to all of us."

"It is the uncertainty of her fate that pierces my heart," observed Delius. "Why there should be savages at all in the airship is puzzling. They are not clever enough to work the vessel themselves. We do not know whether she is in the hands of Barbarians alone—which I can hardly bear to think about—or is merely being held prisoner somewhere by a mixed crew for a time. Nothing so awful has happened for ages."

By sunset the searching airships returned with a story of failure. They had not been able to find any trace of the vessel that had captured the queen, though they reported great commotion in the Barbarian camp across the isthmus.

But the next day we knew the worst.

CHAPTER 19

THE ULTIMATUM

It was after breakfast next morning that the public enquiry into the abduction of the queen was formally opened in the council chamber. Our astronomer friends were there, ourselves, and even Norden. The professor kept discreetly away from us, though if looks could have killed he would have annihilated us on the spot.

"Old Ostrong seems considerably upset," said I. "What we can't understand, friends, is why you let Norden go about on the loose, knowing what a rotter he is. Why not put him in prison?"

Here I ran up against another snag.

"We do not believe in punishment, in revenge," answered Delius. "We have nothing at all corresponding to your system of prisons and punishments. We could not rest comfortably if we knew that we had shut out our fellows from life and freedom. We hold enquiries merely to discover the truth. When that is known, those who are proved wrong-doers are already punished. Everybody sees them in their true colors. To be a convicted criminal at large is a terrible fate. That being our law, we can not deal differently with strangers. Today we shall get the truth, have no fear of that, and those who have done this great wrong to our ruler will hereafter suffer the double pangs of self-loathing and public contempt."

"Something in the idea," said Mark. "Being sent to Coventry and all that wasn't so very comfortable at school, you know. Still, I would give a good deal to have this case tried at the New Bailey."

"They know what they are about," struck in Prince Danda. "They are going to make Norden speak, and his thoughts read, too. Mr. Ostrong most uncomfortable is already."

The professor, gently forced to the front, could not long withstand the searching cross-examination he was put through. The president of the council, a man named Nesor, was pitiless; his eyes seemed to bore into the traitor's brain. Every plausible excuse Norden made was waved aside, and his thoughts revealed, till at last he broke down and confessed.

"I will tell you all," he said, "and much good may it do you. You won't hurt me, so I don't see why I should conceal anything. It is all Ostrong's doing. He guessed I would assist him in any mischief that would damage these other people from my world and spoil their plans to become your benefactors. He's an old fool of a fanatic for your silly humanitarian ideas, and asked me to help him to prevent the council coming to a decision. I suggested that we seize the queen during the eclipse, and we smuggled a couple of the Barbarian prisoners aboard the airship to overawe the mechanics. We had to act in rather too great a hurry, that's all."

"But where is the queen now? How long is she to remain a captive against her will?" asked Nesor.

"Where she is I am not sure," was the reply. "Our plan was that I should also be taken up with the vessel, but one of my 'friends' prevented that. For all I know, the prisoners may have forced the mechanics to take the airship into their country and deliver her to their people. Long before this a message should have reached you from her."

"And you, Ostrong; what have you to say?"

It seemed to us that a chill fell upon the court.

"This man has played me false also," said the white-haired Elder. "I had not read his thought carefully. I see now that he had planned to take the queen to the Barbarians, to throw in his lot with them and help them against us, in order to get her into his power. More than that, he hoped to enable them to conquer the planet, so that he could prevent these other Solitarians returning to their world. My only desire was to stave off the fatal decision of the council until I could persuade you all to keep to the old ways. I would rather die, I would rather the race perished, than that we lived at the cost of wilful slaughter."

"The silly ass!" I cried. "He doesn't see that he is asking for a wholesale slaughter of his own people."

The Jovians are not built like Earth-folk, however, and it was evident that there was yet a considerable body of opinion in favor of Ostrong's ideas. But everybody shrank away from Norden as if he were a leper, and though he affected an air of bravado, he was obviously uncomfortable.

"I could almost wish he had killed himself in the smash of landing in the *Star Shell*," said Mark. "A nice mess he has made of everything! This planet is no place for us, whilst he is here to spoil things. The sooner the *Shell* is repaired and we make tracks for home, the better. After all, for a first attempt at space-traveling, we have not done so badly. But what's the matter now? The president is on his pins again."

"I have just received a wireless message from the queen," Nesor announced gravely. "The truth confirms our worst fears. The Barbarians on the airship compelled the crew to land the vessel in their camp, and then to go on to their chief town. She is now in the hands of the Barbarian general, Megolof, who went

along with her in the ship. She sends this message:

My people. I am held prisoner by the enemy. My life is to be forfeit if their demands are not granted within ten days. If, at the end of that time, our ships and forces are not withdrawn from the isthmus, leaving it free for their hordes to pass over without resistance, if the secret of the Blue Ray be not given up to them, I must die. I shall die by the slow death of the Green Fire; inch by inch I shall be burned to death. Yet I pray you, my people, not to give way because of me. I am but one, and my life is not worth the lives of the tens of thousands who must die if I am saved. Do not give way; let the strangers from Solitaire help you in the fight, and remember that Briseis died for you. Till we meet in the afterworld, farewell.

"That is the message I have received," ended Nesor.

For a moment there was intense silence in the shocked assembly. If such a thing had been done, such a message received, on Earth, I think that anyone as guilty as Norden and Ostrong would have looked his last at the sky that day.

A murmur, a sound that was the indrawing of many breaths, went round the place, and then Ostrong spoke.

"Blame me who will, this that has happened is not of my desire. I would rather go and give my life for hers than that Briseis should die thus. But my faith in the old ways is strong as ever. There is nothing for us to do but agree to the terms of Megelof. We must surrender the isthmus, give up this city, and retire behind the fortresses of the Ridged Hills."

"But never can we give up the secret of the Blue Ray!" cried several voices. "That would be to leave us helpless."

"Even that," insisted the stubborn old man.

"Come out of it, Mark," said I. "The idiots may argue for hours. Come and have a look at the *Shell*. As you remarked yesterday, this is no world for us."

"I am not so sure, Harry," answered my amazing chum. "I think there is work for us here yet—and work of the sort you ought to like, though it is not quite in my line. Whilst the Jovians are talking, it is up to us to act. We must rescue the queen!"

"Good for you, old boy!" I shouted. "When do we start?"

"As soon as we can persuade them to let us have an airship. It is a desperate venture, I'll admit, but we can't rest till we have had a try. After all, it is because of our friend Norden that that splendid woman is in such deadly peril. Now for a map and a little information."

Delius eagerly procured a large-scale chart, and pointed out Malador, the chief town of the Barbarians. It is distant some 7,000 miles, and about twenty miles from the southern edge of the Great Red Forest.

"We will gladly provide an airship that will get you there in four hours, Solitarians," he said. "But when you land, how are you going to effect a rescue from the midst of the enemy? It seems a fearful undertaking."

"We shall not land at Malador, but in the Red Waste," was Mark's confident reply. "You must procure us dresses such as the Barbarians wear, and so disguised, we shall penetrate their country. What we shall do when we get there, we must leave to the moment. We can only make the effort."

"You have said it, Mark!" I cried. "You are coming out of your shell with a vengeance. I'm on, and so is Dandy, I can see by his face. I thought we had glimpsed the last of that nightmarish Red Forest, but if we have to sample it again, well, we have, that's all."

"I will come, also," said Delius.

"And I," said Astris, the captain of the ship that had saved us from the flooded river.

"And I," said Oberon, "shall stay here to watch over Norden, and also to keep in touch with you by wireless. Much may happen before ten suns have risen and set."

Of course, looking back on it now, I can see it was a mad scheme. There were lots of ways in which the civilized race could have used their wonderful powers if they would. It was simply the first idea that came to mind.

Daylight was fading into twilight as we five, three men of Earth and two of Jupiter, with four mechanics, climbed aboard the airship and waved our hands in farewell to the silent crowd around the landing place. We rose, hovered a few moments, and then plunged eastward into the night at two thousand miles an hour.

Utterly fascinating are the thrilling adventures of the Earthmen against the Green Fire and the Red Weed in their desperate attempt to rescue the queen from the Barbarians, as described in next month's WEIRD TALES.

Yule-Horror

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

There is snow on the ground,
And the valleys are cold,
And a midnight profound
Blackly squats o'er the wold;
But a light on the hilltops half-seen hints of feastings unhallowed and old.

There is death in the clouds,
There is fear in the night,
For the dead in their shrouds
Hail the sun's turning flight,
And chant wild in the woods as they dance round a Yule-altar fungous and white.

To no gale of Earth's kind
Sways the forest of oak,
Where the sick boughs entwined
By mad mistletoes choke,
For these pow'rs are the pow'rs of the dark, from the graves of the lost Druid-folk.

THE WOLF

BY SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

"Through the leaping flames the monster sprang for him."

FROM across the lake, clearly and with eery distinctness through the stillness of the night, came the fearsome notes of a hungry timber wolf trailing some straining, panting deer.

Startled, I leaned forward, my pipe cold between my teeth, and listened to the hellish music of that tawny demon of the woods.

The eager, savage hunting cry changed suddenly to a demoniac pæan of victory, broke into a slavering yapping—and then the pulsing silence settled down on us once more.

"Got her!" I said, giving voice involuntarily to my thoughts.

George nodded gravely.

"The timbers seldom miss making their kill," he remarked thoughtfully. "It's no wonder the people of olden times used to believe——"

"Hello the camp!" The ringing, unexpected hail from the dark lake caused us both to start like frightened children. The weird hunting cry of a timber wolf does things to the nerves of even the men who spend all their days in the bush.

Our visitors proved to be two in number: the first a tall chap in the uniform of the Provincial Police, who introduced himself as Tieg McDonald, and a tall, slender man with a professional beard and black, restless eyes, whom McDonald introduced as Dr. Saunders.

It was instantly evident from their attitudes that the doctor was McDonald's prisoner, but aside from the

fact that the doctor carried no weapons of any kind, there was nothing tangible to indicate the fact.

Dr. Saunders was in a pitifully nervous state; his eyes roving constantly, searching the surrounding blackness with an intense and never-resting gaze that bordered on the insane glare of a madman. When he spoke, his voice was jerky and high-pitched, and although his remarks were utterly rational, it was easy to see that he was near the breaking point. McDonald kept a cautious eye on his prisoner at all times, but I somehow caught the impression that there was more of pity than sternness in his regard.

For some time we chatted quite casually, and then I dropped a remark that proved to be a bomb-shell.

"The timbers are ranging south early this year," I said. "I suppose you heard that big boy——"

"God!" groaned the doctor in the voice of a damned soul. "Will I never get away from the voice of those hellish beasts?"

"That's all right, Doc," said the big policeman soothingly. "There's three of us here to see that no wolf comes around the camp." Then McDonald turned to us. "Doc had a mighty bad experience up on Tennelip Bay," he exclaimed. "Ran up against a mad wolf——"

"No!" cried the doctor, his wild eyes searching our faces. "No! It was not a mad wolf. It was not, I tell you! Listen, and I will tell you myself all that happened. "We were——"

"It'll get you all nerved up to tell the story again, Doc," interrupted McDonald. "Better turn in and get some sleep, eh?"

"No. I want to tell these men also, and see what they think," returned the doctor stubbornly. "You think I am mad, McDonald; I am not blind, you know."

The policeman colored a little under his bronze, but he simply shrugged his mighty shoulders and said nothing.

"It was this way," began Dr. Saunders, as calmly as though he were about to relate the most commonplace event. "I came up into the woods on a long hunting trip, seeking not so much a trophy as my health. My practise had worn me down in body and mind, and I knew from experience that a month or so up here in the bush would make another man of me.

"I made the decision to come, and left that same night, trusting to chance to find an outfitter and a guide after I got to the jumping-off place. There had been a lot of hunters this year, however, and the only guide I could find was a French-Indian breed known only as Victor. He had not been long in the country, and I gathered that he was pretty generally hated and mistrusted, but he had trapped last year in the very country I wished to hunt in, and so I took him.

"He was surly, silent, and at times almost savage, but had a most uncanny knack of finding his way in the bush, and of locating game. I saw him discover game on several occasions when it seemed that only the power of scent could have served him. Once or twice, upon awaking late at night, I found him missing from the tent, and always the following mornings he was more sullen and morose than ever. However, I am silent by nature myself, and my guide's disposition, while it caused me some wonderment, gave me no concern whatever. Most of these men of the bush are odd characters.

"One night we were sitting around our fire just as we are sitting here now. It was very dark, without even a star showing through the heavy clouds overhead. I had become weary of my own thoughts, and gave

the brooding Victor a verbal poke to see if I could not rouse him.

"'I heard old man Martin, down at the post, giving some of the fellows the very devil for telling stories of werewolves in this country,' I remarked casually. I knew very well that Victor would be possessed of all the superstitions of his breed, and that old Martin and Victor were bitter personal enemies, but I was utterly unprepared for the sudden hatred that flared up in Victor's eyes.

"Across the fire I saw my guide's deep-set eyes light up with sudden hatred.

"'Ol' Martin, he ees a fool! He ees crack'; he ees a child the secon' time! Who is he to laugh at better men, I ask you?'

"'Then you think there are werewolves in this country?' I asked, amused (God help me!) at the sudden ferocity of the man.

"'How can one know for sure?' shrugged Victor. 'My own people, the French'—he was about one thirty-second French, the rest being several breeds of Indian—'they say for sure that there be werewolves. I have met men who have seen them. Where there ees so much sign, there must be game. Ees eet not so, *M'sieu?*' He smiled ingratiatingly, revealing flashing white teeth beneath his stiff and bristling mustache.

"I sent a cloud of tobacco smoke swirling through the chill night air, and watched it merge with the hurrying wreaths from the fire.

"'Bosh!' I rejoined, more for the purpose of seeing what he would say than for any great interest in the matter under discussion. 'Werewolves have long since been proven nothing but myths, Victor. Only ignorant people believe in such things these days.'

"I was surprized at the effect of my words. Victor's dark eyes lit up with a peculiar flickering light such as I had never before seen except in animals; the kind of weird, green glint you see in the eyes of a dog or a cat at night. His eyes narrowed until they were scarcely more than evil slits, and his thin, red lips drew away from his gleaming teeth until his face was utterly bestial in its expression of demoniac, insane hatred.

"'*M'sieu* thinks so?' he asked, and his voice was low and silky, like the purring of a cat or the soft guttural notes of a fawning dog. 'Well, *M'sieu* should know. He ees educate', and I am but a poor French bushman.' And he stalked off into the darkness toward the tent.

"I started to apologize, as I had not meant to offend the man, but he was gone. Oh well, I thought, let him turn in and sulk if he wanted to! I would finish my pipe anyway before following him. I leaned back comfortably against a big tree and, watching the weaving tongues of yellow and red, lost myself in revery.

"My thoughts drifted into many channels; almost I was dozing, when suddenly, sharp and clear as the note of a bugle on a winter morning, the hunting cry of a wolf shivered through the night silence. Once, twice, three times the eery, hellish call cut through the air; something maniacal, something threatening, something exultant, something pleading in the long, undulating notes. Despite myself I shivered, and drew closer to the glowing coals.

"'Hear the wolf, Victor?' I called to my guide, to break the uncanny silence that followed the challenge of the wolf.

"There was no answer.

"'Victor!' I cried sharply, suddenly apprehensive. Only palpitant silence answered me.

"I scrambled to my feet and ran to the tent. It was empty! Victor had disappeared.

"Suddenly the banshee wailing of the wolf again splintered the deathly stillness. It was nearer now, much

nearer. It came racing down a long slope, then ran up back of the camp, evidently headed directly toward me.

"HASTILY I piled dry wood on the dying fire. The fresh fuel smoldered a moment and then little tongues of eager flame began licking through. All the time the demoniac bugling of the wolf was becoming louder, fiercer; was drawing ever nearer. Was the animal crazy? What little breeze there was was blowing directly toward him, and surely he must have scented the camp. And where had Victor gone while I napped? And *why* had he gone? Had he deserted me, as Indian guides not infrequently do?

"These and a hundred other questions flitted through my mind as I fed the fire and fanned it eagerly until it blazed. No wild animal, I knew, would come close to a fire. Carefully I piled the pitchy wood, and in a minute or two the flames were leaping high into the overhanging darkness, spilling red light like blood over the rocky ground, and setting a thousand shadows springing and dancing like ghoulish imps.

"The threatening, savage cry of the foraging wolf stopped suddenly, and a hushed, expectant silence settled down over the woods. Even the lap-lapping of the water on the shore a few yards away seemed to die to an inaudible murmur.

" 'Old boy changed his mind!' I chuckled. 'Fire is the one thing——'

"There was a soft rustle in the bushes just behind me. I gave a startled exclamation and turned sharply in my tracks. There, not two yards away, a pair of blazing green eyes were watching me narrowly. Even as I turned they came slowly, unwinkingly nearer.

"I jumped for my rifle. It was leaning against a tree on the other side of the fire; I remembered putting it there, where I would be sure to see and clean it before I turned in. I knew just where it was —and yet when I reached for it, it was gone. Frantically, thinking it might have fallen down, I looked around for it. It was not there. And across from me, on the other side of the fire, a huge, tawny timber wolf stalked into the circle of fire and stood with its malevolent green eyes fixed unwinkingly upon me.

"The brute was larger than any timber wolf I had ever seen or heard of, and much darker in color. The lips were curled in a hellish caricature of a smile, and a low snarl came from its slavering mouth. For one long moment I eyed the brute and it eyed me back. And then, suddenly, through the leaping flames and the showering sparks, the monster sprang for me!

"Instinctively I crouched, protecting my throat. The movement was the only thing that saved me, for the long white fangs sank into the fleshy part of my upflung forearm. Desperately I threw myself upon the writhing beast, my hands seeking his throat. Useless, useless! The beast unloosed his hold on my arm and reached for my throat. I leaped backward as quickly as I could, and the shining, cruel teeth clicked savagely together not an inch from their mark.

"Snarling with rage, the animal sprang again, but as he did so a sudden thought struck me, and I cursed explosively. Why hadn't I thought of my revolver before? Hastily I snatched it from its holster under my arm, and as the wolf flung at my throat I fired.

"The result was instantaneous. A look of fear blazed suddenly in the smoky green eyes, and the beast seemed to stop its leap in midair. Before I could fire a second time, the wolf had disappeared into the shadows of the surrounding forest.

"It was limping badly, its left hind leg being apparently badly hurt, and in the firelight I saw several drops of blood gleaming blackly on the rocks at my feet.

"I MADE no effort to follow the animal. I was exhausted with my terrible struggle, and my brain was throbbing dizzily with excitement. I am no hero, and that great beast, bigger than any wolf and with a light of hellish intelligence burning in its eyes, had chilled the very blood of me. Weakly, with a little trembling sigh of relief, I seated myself beside the fire.

"A moment later I started apprehensively. Something was coming through the bush! Was it——? A familiar voice hailed me from the darkness. It was Victor!

"Smiling, his teeth gleaming whitely under his black mustache, Victor came up to the fire.

"'*M'sieu* is awake, eh?' he remarked. 'I have been out hunting for a wolf that I hear while *M'sieu* sleeps. I am so bold as to take the gun, but *sacré!* Of the wolf I do not even catch sight. Shrewd ones, those wolves, *M'sieu!*' He was smiling amiably, but as his glance met mine, I would have sworn there was something mocking in the depths of his dark eyes, and for an instant it seemed that they gleamed with smoky green fire.

"'I saw him,' I remarked shortly. 'He attacked me.'

"'So!' exclaimed Victor in surprize. 'The wolf, he attack you, here by the fire? Eet ees imposs'!'

"'Impossible or not, he did just that,' I declared. 'I shot and wounded him or he would have torn my throat out. Only hit him in the leg, but that was enough.'

"'And tomorrow we will be back in town! Eet ees too bad you have not the time to stay so we could hunt heem!' said Victor, a peculiar note in his voice. 'Even though you do laugh at the werewolves of my fathers, you would like to shoot a timber wolf, ees eet not so?'

"Again the smoky green light seemed to flicker in his eyes. A thousand tumultuous, impossible thoughts swirled through my brain. The smile on Victor's face seemed to turn to a menacing grin, like the snarling visage of a wolf . . . with gleaming white fangs . . . slavering jaws——

"Some instinct caused me to look down. Victor followed the direction of my glance with a smile half of fear, half of hatred.

"*His left leg, from the knee down, was covered with blood!*

"'It was in the left leg that I shot the wolf,' I said musingly, almost unaware that I was thinking aloud.

"'And eet ees the left leg that I hurt when I fell in the dark!' smiled Victor. 'Eet ees what you call a coo-incident, ees eet not, *M'sieu?* Something eet ees hard to believe?' And he chuckled mockingly, triumphantly.

"My overwrought nerves gave way then. I felt something snap out of place up here"—the doctor indicated his head with a vague gesture—"and a dizzy, light-headed feeling swept over me.

"I remember seeing Victor as through a bloody fog, across the fire, but his face had changed to the face of a wolf—the wolf that had leaped through the flames, straight for my throat.

"I think I shouted something as I drew my revolver and fired at that leering caricature of a human face. I am a good shot, and I did not miss, for Victor crumpled in his tracks."

The doctor paused for a moment and stared moodily into the fire.

"I do not remember just what happened after that," he resumed after a few minutes, during which none of

us broke the oddly strained silence. "I left Victor where he fell, I think, and paddled to one of the fishing camps on the lake. Mr. McDonald happened to be there, and he consented to take me back with him. I guess, gentlemen, that is all my story. Do you think I am mad, as Mr. McDonald does, I am sure, or do you think that I know what I saw?"

With a pitiful eagerness he glanced from one face to another.

George was the first to speak.

"I think, Doctor, that you have had a most unusual experience," he said thoughtfully. "And I think Shakespeare was indeed right in saying that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the philosophy of most of us."

I nodded. "That is undoubtedly so, Doctor," was the only remark I could think of, although I knew in my heart, of course, that the doctor was a madman.

It was not until after the doctor had retired that I learned the rest of the story. It was McDonald who threw the last light on the strange tale the doctor had told.

"The funny thing about it," remarked McDonald as we were smoking a last pipe around the fire, "is that when I went back to the doctor's camp, Victor had two bullet holes in his body; one through the leg and one through the head, and the one through the leg was tightly bandaged with a blood-soaked handkerchief—and to the wound were sticking a number of black and yellow hairs—wolf hairs!"

George said nothing, and I said nothing. There are lots of things in the woods of the far north that man is foolish to attempt to explain.

An Old House

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Bathed in mystery and moonlight,
  Wistfully it stands
At the end of a lonely, winding road
  Where cobwebs hang in strands
Of dusty lace an old ghost hung
  Before a sagging door—
And winds go moaning through the rooms
  With fog from down the moor.

Never a light—nor sound, nor laugh—
  Never a footfall—wait!
What was that?—did I hear a step
  Down by the creaking gate?
Echoes resounding in empty halls—
  Shadows that spring like cats—
Sudden drafts that seem like breaths,
  And a fluttering of bats.

Eery tenants—ghosts of old—
  Loves and griefs—and tears—
Underneath a leaking roof
  Haunting mildewed years.
Straggling roses climb the porches
  Hiding broken panes,
Though their roots be dry and fainting
  Waiting for the rains.

Bathed in silent, moonlit fragrance,
  I hear the old ghosts talk—
Must be wind in that old maple
  Down the lonely walk.
Bats, and broken, paneless windows—
  Creaking shutters—weeds—
Loneliness and sobbing wind ghosts,
  Wait for the friend it needs.

The SHADOWS

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

"A fearful thing leaped upon him, a dreadful, purplish shadow-thing."

I DID not begin to see the shadows until I had lived in Old Morris' house for more than a week. Old Morris, dead and gone these many years, had been the scion of a still earlier Irish settler in Santa Cruz, of a family which had come into the island when the Danes, failing to colonize its rich acres, had opened it, in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, to colonists; and younger sons of Irish, Scottish, and English gentry had taken up sugar estates and commenced that baronial life which lasted for a century and which declined after the abolition of slavery and the German bounty on beet sugar had started the long process of West Indian commercial decadence. Mr. Morris' youth had been spent in the French islands.

The shadows were at first so vague that I attributed them wholly to the slight weakness which began to affect my eyes in early childhood, and which, while never materially interfering with the enjoyment of life in general, had necessitated the use of glasses when I used my eyes to read or write. My first experience of them was about 1 o'clock in the morning. I had been at a "Gentlemen's Party" at Hacker's house, "Emerald," as some poetic-minded ancestor of Hacker's had named the family estate three miles out of Christian-

sted, the northerly town, built on the site of the ancient abandoned French town of Bassin.

I had come home from the party and was undressing in my bedroom, which is one of two rooms on the westerly side of the house which stands at the edge of the old "Sunday Market". These two bedrooms open on the market-place, and I had chosen them, rather than the more airy rooms on the other side, because of the space outside. I like to look out on trees in the early mornings, whenever possible, and the ancient market-place is overshadowed with the foliage of hundred-year-old mahogany trees, and a few gnarled "otaheites" and Chinese-bean trees.

I had nearly finished undressing, had noted that my servant had let down and properly fastened the mosquito netting, and had stepped into the other bedroom to open the jalousies so that I might get as much of the night-breeze as possible circulating through the house. I was coming back through the doorway between the two bedrooms, and taking off my dressing gown, at the moment, when the first faint perception of what I have called "the shadows" made itself apparent. It was very dark, just after switching off the electric light in that front bedroom. I had, in fact, to feel for the doorway. In this I experienced some difficulty, and my eyes had not fully adjusted themselves to the thin starlight seeping in through the slanted jalousies of my own room when I passed through the doorway and groped my way toward the great mahogany four-poster in which I was about to lie down for my belated rest.

I saw the nearest post looming before me, closer than I had expected. Putting out my hand, I grasped—nothing. I winked in some surprize, and peered through the slightly increasing light, as my eyes adjusted themselves to the sudden change. Yes, surely,—there was the corner of the bedstead just in front of my face! By now my eyes were sufficiently attuned to the amount of light from outside to see a little plainer. I was puzzled. The bed was not where I had supposed it to be. What could have happened? That the servants should have moved my bed without orders to do so was incredible. Besides, I had undressed, in full electric light in that room, not more than a few minutes ago, and then the bed was standing exactly where it had been since I had had it moved into that room a week before. I kicked, gently, before me with a slippered foot, against the place where that bedpost appeared to be standing—and my foot met no resistance.

I stepped over to the light in my own room, and snapped the button. In the sudden glare, everything readjusted itself to normal. There stood my bed, and here in their accustomed places about the room were ranged the chairs, the polished wardrobe (we do not use cupboards in the West India Islands), the mahogany dressing table,—even my clothes which I had hung over a chair where Albertina my servant would find them in the morning and put them (they were of white drill) into the soiled-clothes bag in the morning.

I shook my head. Light and shadow in these islands seem, somehow, different from what they are like at home in the United States! The tricks they play are different tricks, somehow.

I snapped off the light again, and in the ensuing dead blackness, I crawled in under the loose edge of the mosquito netting, tucked it along under the edge of the mattress on that side, adjusted my pillows and the sheets, and settled myself for a good sleep. Even to a moderate man, these gentlemen's parties are rather wearing sometimes. They invariably last too long. I closed my eyes and

was asleep before I could have put these last ideas into words.

In the morning the recollection of the experience with the bed-being-in-the-wrong-place was gone. I jumped out of bed and into my shower bath at half-past 6, for I had promised O'Brien, captain of the U. S. Marines, to go out with him to the rifle range at La Grande Princesse that morning and look over the butts with him. I like O'Brien, and I am not uninterested in the efficiency of Uncle Sam's Marines, but my chief objective was to watch the pelicans. Out there on the glorious beach of Estate Grande Princesse ("Big Princess" as the Black People call it), a colony of pelicans make their home, and it is a never-ending source of amusement to me to watch them fish. A Caribbean pelican is probably the most graceful flier we have in these latitudes,—barring not even the hurricane bird, that describer of noble arcs and parabolas,—and the most insanely, absurdly awkward creature on land that Providence has cared in a light-hearted moment to create!

I expressed my interest in Captain O'Brien's latest improvements, and while he was talking shop to one of his lieutenants and half a dozen enlisted men he has camped out there, I slipped down to the beach to watch the pelicans fish. Three or four of them were describing curves and turns of indescribable complexity and perfect grace over the green water of the reef-enclosed white beach. Ever and again one would stop short in the air, fold himself up like a jack-knife, turn head downward, his great pouched bill extended like the head of a cruel spear, and drop like a plummet into the water, emerging an instant later with the pouch distended with a fish.

I stayed a trifle too long,—for my eyes. Driving back I observed that I had picked up several sun-spots, and when I arrived home I polished a set of yellowish sun-spectacles I keep for such emergencies and put them on.

The east side of the house had been shaded against the pouring morning sunlight, and in this double shade I looked to see my eyes clear up. The sun-spots persisted, however, in that annoying, recurrent way they have,—almost disappearing and then returning in undiminished kaleidoscopic grotesqueness,—those strange blocks and parcels of pure color changing as one winks from indigo to brown and from brown to orange and then to a blinding turquoise-blue, according to some eery natural law of physics, within the fluids of the eye itself.

The sun-spots were so persistent that morning that I decided to keep my eyes closed for some considerable time and see if that would allow them to run their course and wear themselves out. Blue and mauve grotesques of the vague, general shape of diving pelicans swam and jumped inside my eyes. It was very annoying. I called to Albertina.

"Albertina," said I, when she had come to the door, "please go into my bedroom and close all the jalousies tight. Keep out all the light you can, please."

"Ahl roight, sir," replied the obedient Albertina, and I heard her slapping the jalousie-blinds together with sharp little clicks.

"De jalousie ahl close, sir," reported Albertina. I thanked her, and proceeded with half-shut eyes into the bedroom, which, not yet invaded with afternoon's sunlight and closely shuttered, offered an appearance of deep twilight. I lay, face down, across the bed, a pillow under my face, and my eyes buried in darkness.

Very gradually, the diving pelican faded out, to a cube, to a dim, recur-

rent blur, to nothingness. I raised my head and rolled over on my side, placing the pillow back where it belonged. And as I opened my eyes on the dim room, there stood, in faint, shadowy outline, in the opposite corner of the room, away from the outside wall on the market-place side, the huge, Danish bedstead I had vaguely noted the night before, or rather, early that morning.

It was the most curious sensation, looking at that bed in the dimness of the room. I was reminded of those fourth-dimensional tales which are so popular nowadays, for the bed impinged, spatially, on my large bureau, and the curious thing was that I could see the bureau at the same time! I rubbed my eyes, a little unwisely, but not enough to bring back the pelican sun-spots into them, for I remembered and desisted pretty promptly. I looked, fixedly, at the great bed, and it blurred and dimmed and faded out of my vision.

Again, I was greatly puzzled, and I went over to where it seemed to stand and walked through it,—it being no longer visible to my now restored vision, free of the effects of the sun-spots,—and then I went out into the "hall"—a West Indian drawing room is called "the hall"—and sat down to think over this strange phenomenon. I could not account for it. If it had been poor Prentice, now! Prentice attended all the "gentlemen's parties" to which he was invited with a kind of religious regularity, and had to be helped into his car with a similar regularity, a regularity which was verging on the monotonous nowadays, as the invitations became more and more strained. No,—in my case it was, if there was anything certain about it, assuredly not the effects of strong liquors, for barring an occasional sociable swizzel I retained here in my West Indian residence my American convictions that moderation in such matters was a reasonable virtue. I reasoned out the matter of the phantom bedstead,—for so I was already thinking of it,—as far as I was able. That it was a phantom of defective eyesight I had no reasonable doubt. I had had my eyes examined in New York three months before, and the oculist had pleased me greatly by assuring me that there were no visible indications of deterioration. In fact, Dr. Jusserand had said at that time that my eyes were stronger, sounder, than when he had made his last examination six months before.

Perhaps this conviction,—that the appearance was due to my own physical shortcoming, accounts for the fact that I was not (what shall I say?) *disturbed,* by what I saw, or thought I saw. Confront the most thoroughgoing materialist with a ghost, and he will act precisely like anyone else; like any normal human being who believes in the material world as the outward and visible sign of something which animates it. All normal human beings, it seems to me, are sacramentalists!

I was, for this reason, able to think clearly about the phenomenon. My mind was not clouded and bemused with fear, and its known physiological effects. I can, quite easily, record what I "saw" in the course of the next few days. The bed was clearer to my vision and apprehension than it had been. It seemed to have grown in visibility; in a kind of substantialness, if there is such a word! It appeared more *material* than it had before, less shadowy.

I looked about the room and saw other furniture: a huge, old-fashioned mahogany bureau with men's heads carved on the knuckles of the front legs, Danish fashion. There is precisely such carving on pieces in the museum in Copenhagen, they tell me, those who have seen my drawing of it. I was actually able to do that,

and had completed a kind of plan-picture of the room, putting in all the shadow-furniture, and leaving my own, actual furniture out. Thank the God in whom I devoutly believe, —and know to be more powerful than the Powers of Evil,—I was able to finish that rather elaborate drawing before . . . Well, I must not "run ahead of my story".

That night when I was ready to retire, and had once more opened up the jalousies of the front bedroom, and had switched off the light, I looked, naturally enough under the circumstances, for the outlines of that ghostly furniture. They were much clearer now. I studied them with a certain sense of almost "scientific" detachment. It was, even then, apparent to me that no weakness of the strange complexity which is the human eye could reasonably account for the presence of a well-defined set of mahogany furniture in a room already furnished with real furniture! But I was by now sufficiently accustomed to it to be able to examine it all without that always-disturbing element of fear,—strangeness. I looked at the bedstead and the "roll-back" chairs, and the great bureau, and a ghostly, huge, and quaintly carved wardrobe, studying their outlines, noting their relative positions. It was on that occasion that it occurred to me that it would be of interest to make some kind of drawing of them. I looked the harder after that, fixing the details and the relations of them all in my mind, and then I went into the hall and got some paper and a pencil and set to work.

It was hard work, this of reproducing something which I was well aware was some kind of an "apparition", especially after looking at the furniture in the dark bedroom, switching on the light in another room and then trying to reproduce. I could not, of course, make a direct comparison. I mean it was impossible to look at my drawing and then look at the furniture. There was always a necessary interval between the two processes. I persisted through several evenings, and even for a couple of evenings fell into the custom of going into my bedroom in the evening's darkness, looking at what was there, and then attempting to reproduce it. After five or six days, I had a fair plan, in considerable detail, of the arrangement of this strange furniture in my bedroom,—a plan or drawing which would be recognizable if there were anyone now alive who remembered such an arrangement of such furniture. It will be apparent that a story had been growing up in my mind, or, at least, that I had come to some kind of conviction that what I "saw" was a reproduction of something that had once existed in that same detail and that precise order!

On the seventh night, there came an interruption.

I had, by that time, finished my work, pretty well. I had drawn the room as it would have looked with that furniture in it, and had gone over the whole with India ink, very carefully. As a drawing, the thing was finished, so far as my indifferent skill as a draftsman would permit.

That seventh evening, I was looking over the appearance of the room, such qualms as the eeriness of the situation might have otherwise produced reduced to next-to-nothing partly by my interest, in part by having become accustomed to it all. I was making, this evening, as careful a comparison as possible between my remembered work on paper and the detailed appearance of the room. By now, the furniture stood out clearly, in a kind of light of its own which I can roughly compare only to "phosphorescence." It was not, quite, that. But that will serve, lame as it

is, and trite perhaps, to indicate what I mean. I suppose the appearance of the room was something like what a cat "sees" when she arches her back,—as Algernon Blackwood has pointed out, in *John Silence*,—and rubs against the imaginary legs of some personage entirely invisible to the man in the armchair who idly wonders what has taken possession of his house-pet.

I was, as I say, studying the detail. I could not find that I had left out anything salient. The detail was, too, quite clear now. There were no blurred outlines as there had been on the first few nights. My own, material furniture had, so to speak, sunk back into invisibility, which was sensible enough, seeing that I had put the room in as nearly perfect darkness as I could, and there was no moon to interfere, those nights.

I had run my eyes all around it, up and down the twisted legs of the great bureau, along the carved ornamentation of the top of the wardrobe, along the lines of the chairs, and had come back to the bed. It was at this point of my checking-up that I got what I must describe as the first "shock" of the entire experience.

Something moved, beside the bed.

I peered, carefully, straining my eyes to catch what it might be. It had been something bulky, a slow-moving object, on the far side of the bed, blurred, somewhat, just as the original outlines had been blurred in the beginning of my week's experience. The now strong and clear outlines of the bed, and what I might describe as its ethereal substance, stood between me and it. Besides, the vision of the slow-moving mass was further obscured by a ghostly mosquito-net, which had been one of the last of the details to come into the scope of my strange night-vision.

Those folds of the mosquito-netting moved,—waved, before my eyes.

Someone, it might almost be imagined, was getting into that bed!

I sat, petrified. This was a bit too much for me. I could feel the little chills run up and down my spine. My scalp prickled. I put my hands on my knees, and pressed hard. I drew several deep breaths. "All-overish" is an old New England expression, once much used by spinsters, I believe, resident in that intellectual section of the United States. Whatever the precise connotation of the term, that was the way I felt. I could feel the reactive sensation, I mean, of that particular portion of the whole experience, in every part of my being,—body, mind, and soul! It was,—paralyzing. I reached up a hand that was trembling violently,—I could barely control it, and the fingers, when they touched the hard-rubber button, felt numb,—and switched on the bedroom light, and spent the next ten minutes recovering.

That night, when I came to retire, I dreaded,—actually dreaded,—what might come to my vision when I snapped off the light. This, however, I managed to reason out with myself. I used several arguments—nothing had so far occurred to annoy or injure me; if this were to be a cumulative experience, if something were to be "revealed" to me by this deliberate process of slow materialization which had been progressing for the last week or so, then it might as well be for some good and useful purpose. I might be, in a sense, the agent of Providence! If it were otherwise; if it were the evil work of some discarnate spirit, or something of the sort, well, every Sunday since my childhood, in church, I had recited the Creed, and so admitted, along with the clergy and the rest of the congregation, that God our Father had created all things,—visible *and invisible!* If it were this part of His creation at work, for *any* purpose,

then He was stronger than they. I said a brief prayer before turning off that light, and put my trust in Him. It may appear to some a bit old-fashioned,—even Victorian! But He does not change along with the current fashions of human thought about Him, and this "human thought," and "the modern mind," and all the rest of it, does not mean the vast, the overwhelming majority of people. It involves only a few dozen prideful "intellectuals" at best, or worst!

I switched off the light, and, already clearer, I saw what must have been Old Morris, getting into bed.

I had interviewed old Mr. Bonesteel, the chief government surveyor, a gentleman of parts and much experience, a West Indian born on this island. Mr. Bonesteel, in response to my guarded enquiries,—for I had, of course, already suspected Old Morris; was not my house still called his?—had stated that he remembered Old Morris well, in his own remote youth. His description of that personage and this apparition tallied. This, undoubtedly, was Old Morris. That it was *someone*, was apparent. I felt, somehow, rather relieved to realize that it was he. I knew something about him, you see. Mr. Bonesteel had given me a good description and many anecdotes, quite freely, and as though he enjoyed being called on for information about one of the old-timers like Morris. He had been more reticent, guarded, in fact, when I pressed him for details of Morris' end. That there had been some obscurity,—intentional or otherwise, I could never ascertain,—about the old man, I had already known. Such casual enquiries as I had made on other occasions through natural interest in the person whose name still clung to my house sixty years or more since he had lived in it, had never got me anywhere. I had only gathered what Mr. Bonesteel's more ample account corroborated: that Morris had been eccentric, in some ways, amusingly so. That he had been extraordinarily well-to-do. That he gave occasional large parties, which, contrary to the custom of the hospitable island of St. Croix, were always required to come to a conclusion well before midnight. Why, there was a story of Old Morris almost literally getting rid of a few reluctant guests, by one device or another, from these parties, a circumstance on which hinged several of the amusing anecdotes of that eccentric person!

Old Morris, as I knew, had not always lived on St. Croix. His youth had been spent in Martinique, in the then smaller and less important town of Fort-de-France. That, of course, was many years before the terrific calamity of the destruction of St. Pierre had taken place, by the eruption of Mt. Pelée. Old Morris, coming to St. Croix in young middle-age,—forty-five or thereabouts,—had already been accounted a rich man. He had been engaged in no business. He was not a planter, not a storekeeper, had no profession. Where he produced his affluence was one of the local mysteries. His age, it seemed, was the other.

"I suppose," Mr. Bonesteel had said, "that Morris was nearer a hundred than ninety, when he,—ah,—died. I was a child of about eight at that time. I shall be seventy next August-month. That, you see, would be about sixty-two years ago, about 1861, or about the time your Civil War was beginning. Now my father has told me,—he died when I was nineteen,—that Old Morris looked exactly the same when he was a boy! Extraordinary. The Black People used to say——" Mr. Bonesteel fell silent, and his eyes had an old man's dim, far-away look.

"The Black People have some very strange beliefs, Mr. Bonesteel," said I, attempting to prompt him. "A

good many of them I have heard about myself, and they interest me very much. What particular——"

Mr. Bonesteel turned his mild, blue eyes upon me, reflectively.

"You must drop in at my house one of these days, Mr. Stewart," said he, mildly. "I have some rare old rum that I'd be glad to have you sample, sir! There's not much of it on the island these days, since Uncle Sam turned his prohibition laws loose on us in 1922."

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr. Bonesteel," I replied. "I shall take the first occasion to do so, sir; not that I care especially for 'old rum' except a spoonful in a cup of tea, or in pudding sauce, perhaps; but the pleasure of your company, sir, is always an inducement."

Mr. Bonesteel bowed to me gravely, and I returned his bow from where I sat in his airy office in Government House.

"Would you object to mentioning what that 'belief' was, sir?"

A slightly pained expression replaced my old friend's look of hospitality.

"All that is a lot of foolishness!" said he, with something like asperity. He looked at me, contemplatively.

"Not that I believe in such things, you must understand. Still, a man sees a good many things in these islands, in a lifetime, you know! Well, the Black People——" Mr. Bonesteel looked apprehensively about him, as though reluctant to have one of his clerks overhear what he was about to say, and leaned toward me from his chair, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"They said,—it was a remark here and a kind of hint there, you must understand; nothing definite,—that Morris had interfered, down there in Martinique, with some of their queer doings, offended the Zombi,—something of the kind; that Morris had made some kind of conditions—oh, it was very vague, and probably all mixed up!—you know, whereby he was to have a long life and all the money he wanted,—something like that,—and afterward. . .

"Well, Mr. Stewart, you just ask somebody, sometime, about Morris' death."

Not another word about Old Morris could I extract out of Mr. Bonesteel.

But of course he had me aroused. I tried Despard, who lives on the other end of the island, a man educated at the Sorbonne, and who knows, it is said, everything there is to know about the island and its affairs.

It was much the same with Mr. Despard, who is an entirely different kind of person; younger, for one thing, than my old friend the government surveyor.

Mr. Despard smiled, a kind of wry smile. "Old Morris!" said he, reflectively, and paused.

"Might I venture to ask—no offense, my dear sir!—why you wish to rake up such an old matter as Old Morris' death?"

I was a bit nonplussed, I confess. Mr. Despard had been perfectly courteous, as he always is, but, somehow, I had not expected such an intervention on his part.

"Why," said I, "I should find it hard to tell you, precisely, Mr. Despard. It is not that I am averse to being frank in the face of such an enquiry as yours, sir. I was not aware that there was anything important,—serious, as your tone implies,—about that matter. Put it down to mere curiosity if you will, and answer or not, as you wish, sir."

I was, perhaps, a little nettled at this unexpected, and, as it then seemed to me, finicky obstruction being placed in my way. What could there be in such a case for this formal reticence,—these verbal safe-

guards? If it were a "jumbee" story, there was no importance to it. If otherwise, well, I might be regarded by Despard as a person of reasonable discretion. Perhaps Despard was some relative of Old Morris, and there was something a bit off-color about his death. That, too, might account for Mr. Bonesteel's reticence.

"By the way," I enquired, noting Despard's reticence, "might I ask another question, Mr. Despard?"

"Certainly, Mr. Stewart."

"I do not wish to impress you as idly or unduly curious, but—are you and Mr. Bonesteel related in any way?"

"No, sir. We are not related in any way at all, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Despard," said I, and, bowing to each other after the fashion set here by the Danes, we parted.

I had not learned a thing about Old Morris' death.

I went in to see Mrs. Heidenklang. Here, if anywhere, I should find out what was intriguing me.

Mrs. Heidenklang is an ancient Creole lady, relict of a prosperous storekeeper, who lives, surrounded by a certain state of her own, propped up in bed in an environment of a stupendous quantity of lacy things and gauzy ruffles. I did not intend to mention Old Morris to her, but only to get some information about the Zombi, if that should be possible.

I found the old lady, surrounded by her ruffles and lace things, in one of her good days. Her health has been precarious for twenty years!

It was not difficult to get her talking about the Zombi.

"Yes," said Mrs. Heidenklang, "it is extraordinary how the old beliefs and the old words cling in their minds! Why, Mr. Stewart, I was hearing about a trial in the police court a few days ago. One old Black woman had summoned another for abusive language. On the witness stand the complaining old woman said: 'She cahl me a wuthless ole Cartagene, sir!' Now, think of that! Carthage was destroyed 'way back in the days of Cato the Elder, you know, Mr. Stewart! The greatest town of all Africa. To be a Carthaginian meant to be a sea-robber,—a pirate; that is, a thief. One old woman on this island, more than two thousand years afterward, wishes to call another a thief, and the word 'Cartagene' is the word she naturally uses! I suppose that has persisted on the West Coast and throughout all those village dialects in Africa without a break, all these centuries! The Zombi of the French islands? Yes, Mr. Stewart. There are some extraordinary beliefs. Why, perhaps you've heard mention made of Old Morris, Mr. Stewart. He used to live in your house, you know?"

I held my breath. Here was a possible trove. I nodded my head. I did not dare to speak!

"Well, Old Morris, you see, lived most of his earlier days in Martinique, and, it is said, he had a somewhat adventurous life there, Mr. Stewart. Just what he did or how he got himself involved, seems never to have been made clear, but—in some way, Mr. Stewart, the Black People believe, Morris got himself involved with a very powerful 'Jumbee', and that is where what I said about the persistence of ancient beliefs comes in. Look on that table there, among those photographs, Mr. Stewart. There! that's the place. I wish I were able to get up and assist you. These maids! Everything askew, I have no doubt! Do you observe a kind of fish-headed thing, about as big as the palm of your hand? Yes! that is it!"

I found the "fish-headed thing" and carried it over to Mrs. Heiden-

klang. She took it in her hand and looked at it. It lacked a nose, but otherwise it was intact, a strange, uncouth-looking little godling, made of anciently-polished volcanic stone, with huge, protruding eyes, small, humanlike ears, and what must have been a nose like a Tortola jackfish, or a black witch-bird, with its parrot beak.

"Now that," continued Mrs. Heidenklang, "is one of the very ancient household gods of the aborigines of Martinique, and you will observe the likeness in the idea to the *Lares* and *Penates* of your school-Latin days. Whether this is a *lar* or a *penate,* I can not tell," and the old lady paused to smile at her little joke, "but at any rate he is a representation of something very powerful, —a fish-god of the Caribs. There's something Egyptian about the idea, too, I've always suspected; and, Mr. Stewart, a Carib or an Arawak Indian,—there were both in these islands, you know,—looked much like an ancient Egyptian; perhaps half like your Zuñi or Aztec Indians, and half Egyptian, would be a fair statement of his appearance. These fish-gods had men's bodies, you see, precisely like the hawk-headed and jackal-headed deities of ancient Egypt.

"It was one of those, the Black People say, with which Mr. Morris got himself mixed up,—'Gahd knows' as they say,—how! And, Mr. Stewart, they say, his death was terrible! The particulars I've never heard, but my father knew, and he was sick for several days after seeing Mr. Morris' body. Extraordinary, isn't it? And when are you coming this way again, Mr. Stewart? Do drop in and call on an old lady."

I felt that I was progressing.

The next time I saw Mr. Bonesteel, which was that very evening, I stopped him on the street and asked for a word with him.

"What was the date, or the approximate date, Mr. Bonesteel, of Mr. Morris' death? Could you recall that, sir?"

Mr. Bonesteel paused and considered.

"It was just before Christmas," said he. "I remember it not so much by Christmas as by the races, which always take place the day after Christmas. Morris had entered his sorrel mare Santurce, and, as he left no heirs, there was no one who 'owned' Santurce, and she had to be withdrawn from the races. It affected the betting very materially and a good many persons were annoyed about it, but there wasn't anything that could be done."

I thanked Mr. Bonesteel, and not without reason, for his answer had fitted into something that had been growing in my mind. Christmas was only eight days off. This drama of the furniture and Old Morris getting into bed, I had thought (and not unnaturally, it seems to me), might be a kind of re-enactment of the tragedy of his death. If I had the courage to watch, night after night, I might be relieved of the necessity of asking any questions. I might witness whatever had occurred, in some weird reproduction, engineered, God knows how!

For three nights now, I had seen the phenomenon of Old Morris getting into bed repeated, and each time it was clearer. I had sketched him into my drawing, a short, squat figure, rather stooped and fat, but possessed of a strange, gorillalike energy. His movements, as he walked toward the bed, seized the edge of the mosquito-netting and climbed in, were, somehow, full of *power,* which was the more apparent since these were ordinary motions. One could not help imagining that Old Morris would have been a tough customer to tackle, for all his alleged age!

This evening, at the hour when this phenomenon was accustomed to enact itself, that is, about 11 o'clock, I watched again. The scene was very much clearer, and I observed something I had not noticed before. Old Morris' *simulacrum* paused just before seizing the edge of the netting, raised its eyes, and began, with its right hand, a motion precisely like one who is about to sign himself with the cross. The motion was abruptly arrested, however, only the first of the four touches on the body being made.

I saw, too, something of the expression of the face that night, for the first time. At the moment of making the arrested sign, it was one of despairing horror. Immediately afterward, as this motion appeared to be abandoned for the abrupt clutching of the lower edge of the mosquito-net, it changed into a look of ferocious stubbornness, of almost savage self-confidence. I lost the facial expression as the appearance sank down upon the bed and pulled the ghostly bedclothes over itself.

Three nights later, when all this had become as greatly intensified as had the clearing-up process that had affected the furniture, I observed another motion, or what might be taken for the faint foreshadowing of another motion. This was not on the part of Old Morris. It made itself apparent as lightly and elusively as the swift flight of a moth across the reflection of a lamp, over near the bedroom door (the doors in my house are more than ten feet high, in fourteen-foot-high walls), a mere flicker of something,—something entering the room. I looked, and peered at that corner, straining my eyes, but nothing could I see save what I might describe as an intensification of the black shadow in that corner near the door, vaguely formed like a slim human figure, though grossly out of all human proportion. The vague shadow looked purple against the black. It was about ten feet high, and otherwise as though cast by an incredibly tall, thin human being.

I made nothing of it then; and again, despite all this cumulative experience with the strange shadows of my bedroom, attributed this last phenomenon to my eyes. It was too vague to be at that time accounted otherwise than as a mere subjective effect.

But the night following, I watched for it at the proper moment in the sequence of Old Morris' movements as he got into bed, and this time it was distinctly clearer. The shadow, it was, of some monstrous shape, ten feet tall, long, angular, of vaguely human appearance, though even in its merely shadowed form, somehow cruelly, strangely inhuman! I can not describe the cold horror of its realization. The head-part was, relatively to the proportions of the body, short and broad, like a pumpkin head of a "man" made of sticks by boys, to frighten passers-by on Hallowe'en.

The next evening I was out again to an entertainment at the residence of one of my hospitable friends, and arrived home after midnight. There stood the ghostly furniture, there on the bed was the form of the apparently sleeping Old Morris, and there in the corner stood the shadow, little changed from last night's appearance.

The next night would be pretty close to the date of Old Morris' death. It would be that night, or the next at latest, according to Mr. Bonesteel's statement. The next day I could not avoid the sensation of something impending!

I entered my room and turned off the light a little before 11, seated myself, and waited.

The furniture tonight was, to my vision, absolutely indistinguishable from reality. This statement may sound somewhat strange, for it will

be remembered that I was sitting in the dark. Approximating terms again, I may say, however, that the furniture was visible in a light of its own, a kind of "phosphorescence", which apparently emanated from it. Certainly there was no natural source of light. Perhaps I may express the matter thus: that light and darkness were *reversed* in the case of this ghostly bed, bureau, wardrobe, and chairs. When actual light was turned on, they disappeared. In darkness, which, of course, is the absence of physical light, they emerged. That is the nearest I can get to it. At any rate, tonight the furniture was entirely, perfectly, visible to me.

OLD MORRIS came in at the usual time. I could see him with a clarity exactly comparable to what I have said about the furniture. He made his slight pause, his arrested motion of the right hand, and then, as usual, cast from him, according to his expression, the desire for that protective gesture, and reached a hard-looking, gnarled fist out to take hold of the mosquito-netting.

As he did so, a fearful thing leaped upon him, a thing out of the corner by the high doorway,—the dreadful, purplish shadow-thing. I had not been looking in that direction, and while I had not forgotten this newest of the strange items in this fantasmagoria which had been repeating itself before my eyes for many nights, I was wholly unprepared for its sudden appearance and malignant activity.

I have said the shadow was purplish against black. Now that it had taken form, as the furniture and Old Morris himself had taken form, I observed that this purplish coloration was actual. It was a glistening, humanlike, almost metallic-appearing thing, certainly ten feet high, completely covered with great, iridescent fish-scales, each perhaps four square inches in area, which shimmered as it leaped across the room. I saw it for only a matter of a second or two. I saw it clutch surely and with a deadly malignity, the hunched body of Old Morris, from behind, just, you will remember, as the old man was about to climb into his bed. The dreadful thing turned him about as a wasp turns a fly, in great, flail-like, glistening arms, and never, to the day of my death, do I ever expect to be free of the look on Old Morris' face,—a look of a lost soul who knows that there is no hope for him in this world or the next,—as the great, squat, rounded head, a head precisely like that of Mrs. Heidenklang's little fish-jumbee, descended, revealing to my horrified sight one glimpse of a huge, scythelike parrot-beak which it used, with a nodding motion of the ugly head, to plunge into its writhing victim's breast, with a tearing motion like the barracoota when it attacks and tears. . . .

I fainted then, for that was the last of the fearful picture which I can remember.

I awakened a little after 1 o'clock, in a dark and empty room, peopled by no ghosts, and with my own, more commonplace, mahogany furniture thinly outlined in the faint light of the new moon which was shining cleanly in a starry sky. The fresh night-wind stirred the netting of my bed. I rose, shakily, and went and leaned out of the window, and lit and puffed rapidly at a cigarette, which perhaps did something to settle my jangling nerves.

The next morning, with a feeling of loathing which has gradually worn itself out in the course of the months which have now elapsed since my dreadful experience, I took up my drawing again, and added as well as I could the fearful scene I had witnessed. The completed picture was a horror, crude as is my work in this direction. I wanted to destroy

it, but I did not, and I laid it away under some unused clothing in one of the large drawers of my bedroom wardrobe.

THREE days later, just after Christmas, I observed Mr. Despard's car driving through the streets, the driver being alone. I stopped the boy and asked him where Mr. Despard was at the moment. The driver told me Mr. Despard was having breakfast,—the West Indian midday meal,—with Mr. Bonesteel at that gentleman's house on the Prince's Cross Street. I thanked him and went home. I took out the drawing, folded it, and placed it in the inside breast pocket of my coat, and started for Bonesteel's house.

I arrived fifteen minutes or so before the breakfast hour, and was pleasantly received by my old friend and his guest. Mr. Bonesteel pressed me to join them at breakfast, but I declined.

Mr. Bonesteel brought in a swizzel, compounded of his very old rum, and after partaking of this in ceremonious fashion, I engaged the attention of both gentlemen.

"Gentlemen," said I, "I trust that you will not regard me as too much of a bore, but I have, I believe, a legitimate reason for asking you if you will tell me the manner in which the gentleman known as Old Morris, who once occupied my house, met his death."

I stopped there, and immediately discovered that I had thrown my kind old host into a state of embarrassed confusion. Glancing at Mr. Despard, I saw at once that if I had not actually offended him, I had, by my question, at least put him "on his dignity." He was looking at me severely, rather, and I confess that for a moment I felt a bit like a schoolboy. Mr. Bonesteel caught something of this atmosphere, and looked helplessly at Despard. Both men shifted uneasily in their chairs; each waited for the other to speak.

Despard, at last, cleared his throat.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Stewart," said he, slowly, "but you have asked a question which for certain reasons, no one, aware of the circumstances, would desire to answer. The reasons are, briefly, that Mr. Morris, in certain respects, was—what shall I say, not to do the matter an injustice?—well, perhaps I might say he was abnormal. I do not mean that he was crazy. He was, though, eccentric. His end was such that stating it would open up a considerable argument, one which agitated this island for a long time after he was found dead. By a kind of general consent, that matter is taboo on the island. That will explain to you why no one wishes to answer your question. I am free to say that Mr. Bonesteel here, in considerable distress, told me that you had asked it of him. You also asked me about it not long ago. I can add only that the manner of Mr. Morris' end was such that——" Mr. Despard hesitated, and looked down, a frown on his brow, at his shoe, which he tapped nervously on the tiled floor of the gallery where we were seated.

"Old Morris, Mr. Stewart," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, in which, I imagined, he was carefully choosing his words, "was, to put it plainly, murdered! There was much discussion over the identity of the murderer, but the most of it, the unpleasant part of the discussion, was rather whether he was killed by human agency or not! Perhaps you will see now, sir, the difficulty of the matter. To admit that he was murdered by an ordinary murderer is, to my mind, an impossibility. To assert that some other agency, something ab-human, killed him, opens up the question of one's belief, one's credulity. 'Magic' and occult agencies are, as you are aware, strongly in-

trenched in the minds of the ignorant people of these islands. None of us cares to admit a similar belief. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Stewart, and will you let the matter rest there, sir?"

I drew out the picture, and, without unfolding it, laid it across my knees. I nodded to Mr. Despard, and, turning to our host, asked:

"As a child, Mr. Bonesteel, were you familiar with the arrangement of Mr. Morris' bedroom?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Bonesteel, and added: "Everybody was! Persons who had never been in the old man's house, crowded in when——" I intercepted a kind of warning look passing from Despard to the speaker. Mr. Bonesteel, looking much embarrassed, looked at me in that helpless fashion I have already mentioned, and remarked that it was hot weather these days!

"Then," said I, "perhaps you will recognize its arrangement and even some of the details of its furnishing," and I unfolded the picture and handed it to Mr. Bonesteel.

If I had anticipated its effect upon the old man, I would have been more discreet, but I confess I was nettled by their attitude. By handing it to Mr. Bonesteel (I could not give it to both of them at once) I did the natural thing, for he was our host. The old man looked at what I had handed him, and (this is the only way I can describe what happened) became, suddenly, as though petrified. His eyes bulged out of his head, his lower jaw dropped and hung open. The paper slipped from his nerveless grasp and fluttered and zigzagged to the floor, landing at Despard's feet. Despard stooped and picked it up, ostensibly to restore it to me, but in doing so, he glanced at it, and had *his* reaction. He leaped frantically to his feet, and positively goggled at the picture, then at me. Oh, I was having my little revenge for their reticence, right enough!

"My God!" shouted Despard. "My God, Mr. Stewart, where did you get such a thing?"

Mr. Bonesteel drew in a deep breath, the first, it seemed, for sixty seconds, and added his word.

"Oh my God!" muttered the old man, shakily. "Mr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart! what is it, what is it? where——"

"It is a Martinique fish-zombi, what is known to professional occult investigators like Elliott O'Donnell and William Hope Hodgson as an 'elemental'," I explained, calmly. "It is a representation of how poor Mr. Morris actually met his death; until now, as I understand it, a purely conjectural matter. Christiansted is built on the ruins of French Bassin, you will remember," I added. "It is a very likely spot for an 'elemental'!"

"But, but," almost shouted Mr. Despard, "Mr. Stewart, where did you get this, its——"

"I made it," said I, quietly, folding up the picture and placing it back in my inside pocket.

"But how——?" this from both Despard and Bonesteel, speaking in unison.

"I saw it happen, you see," I replied, taking my hat, bowing formally to both gentlemen, and murmuring my regret at not being able to remain for breakfast, I departed.

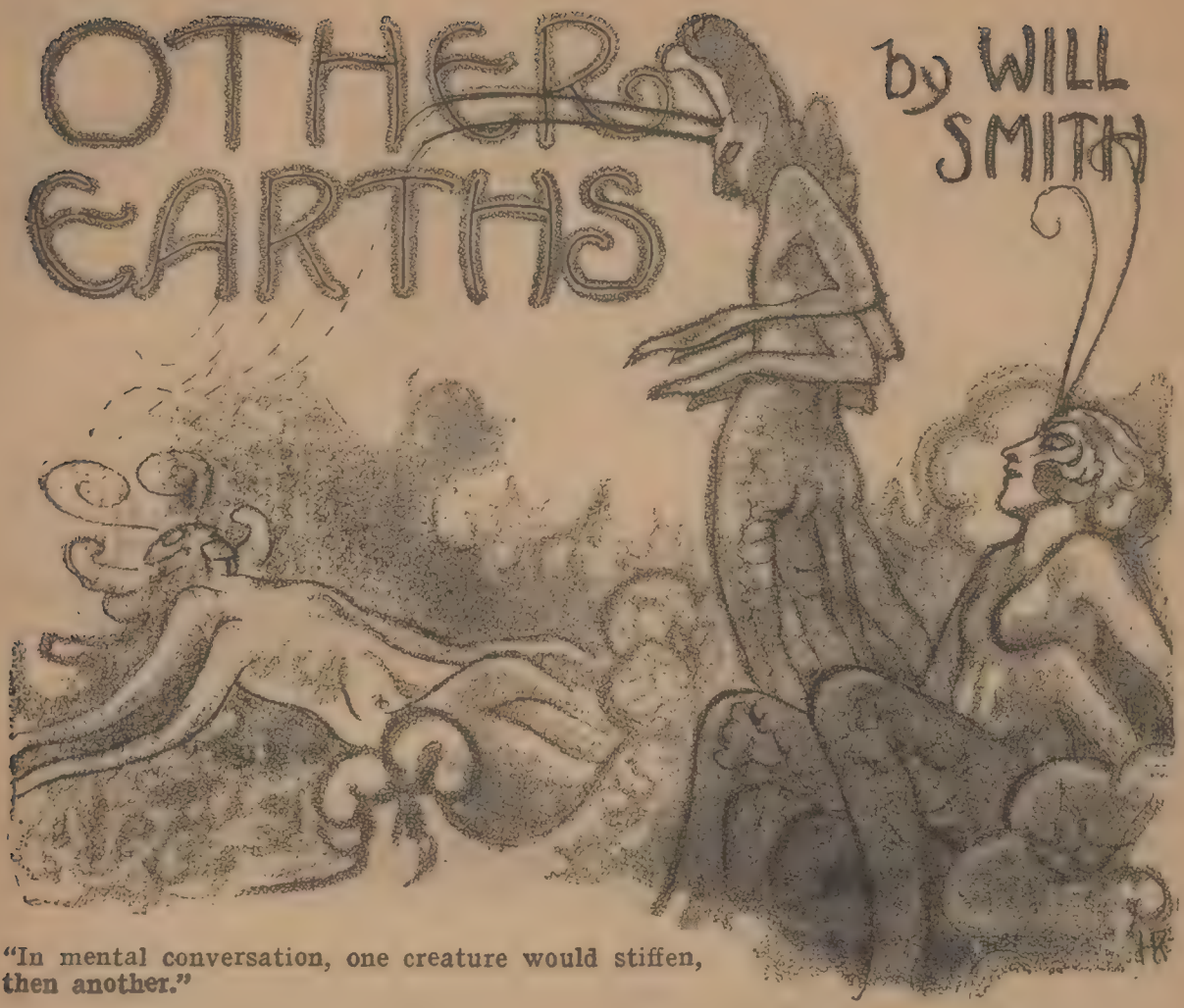
And as I reached the bottom of Mr. Bonesteel's gallery steps and turned along the street in the direction of Old Morris' house, where I live, I could hear their voices speaking together:

"But how, how——?" This was Bonesteel.

"Why, why——?" And that was Despard.

OTHER EARTHS

by WILL SMITH



"In mental conversation, one creature would stiffen, then another."

"PROJECT vision by radio!"

"Exactly," said the professor, quietly. "Or rather, not exactly; although it does amount to the same thing. Let us say I can direct your vision by radio. And intensify its force."

"Do you mean to say there is such a thing as a *force* of vision?" I smiled. Professor Noone had always been noted, even back in college days, for his rabid refusal to accept some of the established laws of physics.

"Certainly there is a force of vision. It makes me tired the way people will accept some old alchemist's theories regarding everyday phenomena and call them laws. These people—some of the so-called best minds of the country, too—never question these snap-judgment laws, but follow the old paths of science like so many blatting sheep.

"An apple hit old man Newton on the head, and he jumped up and strung off his drivel about the laws of gravitation. It must have been the delirious babbling resulting from the blow. Yet because his theory sounded reasonable, people ever since have worshiped it. Why, I tell you——"

I was amused, but I hated to have him get started now on one of his hours-long impromptu lectures. Not for nothing had the faculty of Yaleton discharged him. I had thought at the time, along with most of the students, that the old fellow had been done an injustice. In the thirty years since, whenever I had thought of him I had idealized the professor

as a martyr. But here was the reality, crazy without a doubt.

To halt the tide of erudite nonsense that I felt sure was coming, I broke in: "But my time is limited, Professor. Why did you ask me here? Of course your laboratory is bound to interest me as a writer, and I——"

"Gravitation is a force coming not from some mysterious source in the center of the earth, but from the object or substance in question itself. Newton——"

"I must meet a fellow at half-past 8. When I ran across you on the street tonight I was pleased to find an old friend, and was interested in your description of this laboratory. I was glad to come see it, but as for this idiotic talk of——"

"Newton's apple attracted the earth, not the earth the apple. If the apple had been bigger and the earth smaller, the earth would have come up to meet the apple. In fact, I'm not sure but that's what happened. The earth may have carried Newton up to the apple, while the tree went on up beyond it. Of course Newton didn't know he was getting a free ride, but that's the point. We don't *know* anything in science, and we mustn't take anyone else's say-so."

"Well," I rose stiffly, "I will bid you good evening."

"Hm-m. No, that wouldn't do. The earth would be twitching constantly in all directions, going up to meet apples everywhere as fast as they ripen. It might try to meet an apple in Canton, China, and one in Canton, Maine, at the same time, and burst in the effort. However, I am convinced—I have proved—that Newton's apple attracted the earth. Apple, earth; earth, apple—which gives us 'earth-apple'. 'Earth-apple', or 'terpomo', is the way they say 'potato' in Esperanto. And speaking of potatoes, I can demonstrate that—— *Sit down!*"

I fell into my chair, blasted into it by the explosive force of Noone's yell. I confess I was badly frightened. A raving maniac!

"Now then." The professor spoke with a cold, steely directness. "If you don't care for my 'idiotic talk', kindly refrain from questioning my statements. As for your friend, you will not meet him at half past 8. Oh, don't look so frightened—I'm not crazy, and nothing is farther from my thoughts than harm to you. You will not want to leave here tonight, that's all.

"I have one more thing to say on gravitation. This evening I propose to demonstrate something else, but another time I shall prove to you that the phenomenon of gravitation is due to a force generated within a given substance and reaching out toward the earth in the form of rays. And furthermore, I shall bend those rays for you. Can you imagine the result of bent rays of gravitation?"

I was appalled. Gravitation drawing in a curved line or even around an angle! It seemed plausible enough—as plausible as Newton's theory. . . But it was absurd, of course! Still——

"What about the radio vision projector, Professor?"

"Now you sound interested. You will be more interested before morning. Come into my—astronomical observatory."

2

Although the room into which we passed was lined with charts of the heavens, it held none of the other aspects of the orthodox observatory. Where was the domed ceiling? Where the circular walls, the raised platforms, the slot in the roof? This was an ordinary little square room with the perfectly common type of

ceiling. The thing most obviously lacking I missed last. The telescope!

"Ah, yes!" Noone smiled genially. "The telescope. Here you are." He motioned toward the center of the room.

Still I was mystified. All the room contained, as far as I could see, was the group of furnishings in the middle of the soft drugget. There were a few armchairs arranged around an oak library table, a well-stocked smoking-stand and an innocuous-appearing radio cabinet. It looked to me like only a place for a gentleman to smoke and toy with the ether. But there were the charts, fast enough, and that cabinet might mean something.

"Be seated, Mr. Phillips. Have a cigar or something. We will—toy with the ether." For the second time, Professor Noone handled my mental phrase coolly, delving into the cabinet the while.

"Here are our head-sets. Ah, you place yours over your ears. That looks sensible enough, but let me put it over your eyes. So! Don't be alarmed. I shall don mine in the same way presently."

The man *was* crazy, then!

"We will now tune in. Thus. And now I have my eye-phones, so to speak, adjusted. Now who's crazy?"

Not Noone, surely! Or if he was, so was I. For before my eyes was spread out a vast, bright galaxy, exactly as if I lay sprawled on my back, star-gazing! So complete was the illusion that I fancied I felt a draft of cool night air on my forehead.

"While you are picking out a star to visit," Noone was saying, mildly, "let me expound another idiotic theory. Some old duck or other—no matter who it was, for he was wrong, of course—told us that vision consists, roughly, of light rays caught on a highly sensitive screen within the eye. If there is no light, we are told, there is no vision. The rays that reach the eye have first to squirt out from some such source as the sun or an electric bulb or what not, strike the object to be seen, and bounce off into the eye—so the books say.

"I say that vision, like gravitation, originates within the object. The eye manufactures and gives off a ray of its own. Think of the Evil Eye, which is positively known to emit a shaft, baneful though it is. Light simply plays the part of a stimulant to the ray-making mechanism—a sort of catalytic agent. The more light, the more rays, and the more powerful they are. And the farther we can see.

"The eye rays, I have learned, are mainly exceedingly high-frequency electrical rays. My little apparatus catches these and adds to them the beams from an intense cold light generated within the cabinet. The resulting rays when put through a special kind of transformer are converted into powerful radio waves which are projected into space by a series of ordinary directional antennæ. So great is their power that they travel at a speed many thousand times greater than that of light. And distances measured in light-years become only a matter of minutes.

"The directional antennæ I control with certain knobs on the panel. The intensity, or range, of the vision ray is governed by the intensity of the light added, which I control with a single knob. The range is infinite.

"How do you like my telescope? Would you like to look closer at one of those planets? What about that pretty red one on the left?"

I heard Noone's fingernails rasping against the radio panel. Evidently he was turning on his cold light, for as I stared—upward, I must perforce call it—the stars grew nearer and brighter. The red star moved toward the left side of the picture and disappeared.

"The antennæ will fix that," said Noone. I heard a momentary sound as of static, and the star swung into view again. "There, our objective is centered properly. Let's move up on it."

So far, one could see as much through the regulation type of telescope. I began to suspect trickery of some obscure sort, but my suspicions were short-lived. A network of canals spread out before my eyes and every minute became nearer and plainer! Canals they were, unmistakably.

The professor began to speak, but in a voice so incredibly tender as to suggest a woman crooning over her baby.

"Mars!" he murmured. "Ever the subject of conjecture and controversy. And you and I are permitted to learn the answers to the questions of centuries."

Nearer grew the canals, and nearer. What had been only scratches across them developed rapidly into sets of parallel lines and then bridges—giant suspension bridges the like of which Earth engineers have never conceived! I grew giddy in my excitement as antlike creatures crawling along them changed and grew, until I could see them for what they were.

Men! Mars *is* inhabited!

3

TIME? I knew nothing of time. I was rapt, enchanted. Eight-thirty came and went, and might have come a dozen times, for all I knew. I was conscious only of the quick, hushed breathing of the man beside me on Earth, and the teeming life and cataclysmic sights of that world above us.

Mars—with its queer people so miraculously like the familiar conception of Wells, its gigantic structures, titanic feats of a civilization far, far beyond ours—we explored at will. So transported were we that it was perhaps an hour before either spoke.

We had come to rest directly over, as it were, a monster building with even more than the usual number of queer antenna wires overhead.

"I have been here many times"—it was Noone, scarcely breaking the silence—"and learned many things. Shall we look in the windows? My antennæ will direct our vision anywhere."

We seemed to float downward, to halt beside a great, single-paned window perhaps two hundred feet from the ground.

"The middle story," Noone whispered, "and the most interesting. Now!"

For a moment I had the sensation of touring slowly and smoothly in midair, as though suspended spiderwise by a thread. Next I was looking through the crystal-clear, foot-thick plate-glass.

How can I, with faculties poor even by Earth standards, hope to describe the myriad activities of the insect-men within? In the short space I could bear to look, I saw miracle heaped on miracle in the most matter-of-fact kind of way. Dross into gold? Easy, for these people. I saw it done in the twinkling of an eye. That was the least of their stolid marvels. It was all too steep for me, and to call back my reeling senses I shut my eyes.

"Don't!" The professor fairly screamed it. "You made me miss the most important part—the very crux—of an experiment that—— But pardon me; of course you didn't understand. When you want to shut your eyes again let me know. Just to teach you, watch what happens when I shut mine."

I had to smile, in spite of my chagrin. I understood quickly enough why Noone had been annoyed at me. At his shout I had of course popped

my eyes open. I had fixed them absently on a Martian workman inhaling—literally—his lunch. I was just in the act of wondering how the food smelled when the scene was wiped out!

In a flash what had been a vista of whirring machinery and hurrying little men became a great luminous ball covered over with a network of lines.

"You see, Mr. Phillips, you are half-way between Earth and Mars. The reason, of course, is that by closing my eyes I cut off half the optic force. Of course I can remedy the situation by increasing the cold light, but it's much easier for me to—open my eyes again."

The workman rose and stretched, and all seemed well on Mars.

"Likewise"—the scene changed again as the professor went on—"I can close one eye and leave you three-quarters of the way between here and there. If I shut both eyes and you shut one, you will be one-quarter of the way along, as you can doubtless understand by now." Professor Noone laughed, his good humor restored.

"Let's look over some of the other planets," he suggested amiably. "We can return to Mars later if we wish. Let's see now."

He shut off the light entirely, and immediately came my original sensation of lying on my back gazing at the stars. The red planet was in the middle of the heavens now. The scientist went on.

"Look them over and pick out another star. Venus over there! Going up?"

"Hold on, Professor. Honestly, this is—it seems somehow—indecent. To hang over another world—or over this world either, I suppose it is possible—looking down on its creatures, peeking in their windows, seems too—godlike. I'm afraid——"

"Phillips, do you believe in God?"

Such a question fired at me at such a time had an indescribably terrifying effect, and I tore off that blasphemous head-set. As I glared at the man, Noone had followed suit, and we sat eye to eye.

"Certainly. Don't you?"

"Absolutely. Yes indeed, my dear Phillips. How else can I account for the wonders I have seen? There must be some great purpose behind it all. But as for the God of the orthodox Bible—if you have faith in such a One, hold tight to it. I propose to show you things now that will shake that faith. Shall I go on?"

Shake my faith in the Bible? No man could do that—let this one try if he wished. Yet my voice held far from the stoutness I meant it to hold as I answered him.

"Go ahead."

4

"I HAVE to follow a blazed—or blazing—trail to get to my present objective. I have named the planet 'Ago'. The inhabitants call it—but you will learn."

I wondered why all the mystery. Once more I tried to bulwark my courage against fear of the unknown. But the journey in itself was fearsome enough.

We were bound, optically speaking, far beyond the realm of the wildest astronomer's nightmare. Just as a starter, the professor had tuned us in on Neptune.

"Neptune is the farthermost away from Earth of all the known planets," Noone muttered. "I have been amused to learn that the astronomers during 1924 made the discovery that the known universe is at least a million light years across. With my little radio telescope these learned gentlemen would find their known universe increasing somewhat. Why, see here——"

We had been standing, figuratively, on the surface of Neptune. All the while he was speaking Noone had been swinging our vision ray backward and forward, sweeping it slowly across the new, fearsome sky. With his last words he had brought the ray to bear steadily on a certain tree-shaped constellation and was now bringing that constellation rapidly nearer. Only dimly visible at first, the tree was flashing at us at such a pace that I instinctively recoiled. In a matter of seconds the tree had leaped upon us and we had passed through it. I breathed again. I had the sensation of having miraculously survived a blow from a burning Christmas tree.

In the center of our field of vision, among a host of queerly colored bodies, there hung one star of a hard, brilliant white. Our pace slowed.

"Well, Phillips," the professor chuckled, "their 'known universe' is far behind us. We traveled along at a leisurely gait until we got to Neptune, but you must know we ticked off quite a distance. The astronomers admit that Neptune is nearly three billion miles from our sun. The jump to Neptune, however, was a mere bagatelle. Our quick second jump—the leap through the trees—was something like one million times as long. Now, as for this nice white star ahead, so many million light-years away from Earth, what do you suppose it is?"

"Ago?" I hazarded, brightly.

"No. Just the second of some seventy blazes on our trail to Ago."

Stunned, I subsided.

"I should like to make all my jumps as quickly as the last one," said Noone, "but unfortunately I can't always have such a fine starry hoop to jump through and guide my jump. We shall have to go slowly and cautiously at times. Now watch the white star."

I watched, while this body never dreamed of by ordinary astronomers grew. It became a pea, a marble, an orange, and so on until it lost all spherical shape and became a sheet of beaten silver filling our field of vision. Still it drew nearer; the silver became lined, scarred, and discolored in spots. Presently it was the surface of a world—a bleak, evilly forbidding world.

Again Noone manipulated his antennæ until we got a view of a new sky. Again he located a star far beyond and brought it close.

"It took me a year to find this short path to Ago. It has been three years since I first stumbled onto the planet and lost her, and it was a year before I found her again."

Professor Noone talked on for some time, describing his method of plotting out the course. Some day, he hoped to have a system of micrometrically divided dials on his antennæ controls, so that he could make a memorandum of the exactly correct direction of any desired star.

The talk was interesting, but it had been a long time now since we had pushed off from Earth, and the strain was beginning to tell on me. How many trillions of light-years away could this Ago be? I wondered again why Noone had chosen such a name, and what the Agonians called their planet. How, for that matter, did Noone know what they called it? How could he know their language or read their writings? If he did know the name, why not tell it to me?

"Ah!" The professor's pleased little exclamation aroused me. "Now we are in Ago's solar system." And presently, "That pale bluish planet! It's Ago. Watch it."

Here was an end to the suspense, then. I was glad to fix my attention on the planet and watch it go through the same metamorphoses as had those others. But as the surface came near enough for us to make out the contour of the continents I observed that

which ended the suspense indeed. Now the world was so close I could easily pick out the mountains, lakes and forests. I spoke to my companion with a trace of pique.

"This is an anticlimax, I must say, Professor. Didn't you rather go astray in your calculations?"

"That's only the first of a number of questions you will be asking directly," he said imperturbably. "I can't possibly answer them all, so I shall refrain from answering any. You will see."

I SAW, all right. I saw that Professor Noone, A.M., Ph.D., and Lord knows what-all, with all his attainments, was positively crazy. This planet to which I had been led with such a blare of trumpets was—Mother Earth!

"'Ago', eh? Well, I know what the inhabitants call it. They call it 'Earth'."

"The inhabitants call it Earth," parroted Noone.

Oh well, this was novel at least. Let the show go on. I watched the familiar outline of North America spread out and pass from the sides of the field. The Mississippi flowed through the center of the picture for a moment and then moved over and away to the left. The well-known colored patchwork of states was oddly but naturally missing, and so were the printed names. But here was something I could recognize at once—the Capitol at Albany. Down the Hudson we sped, and here was——

"New York," I shouted.

"New York," came Noone's echo.

"See here, Professor. Of course I see the joke now. You wanted me to see ourselves as others see us. But why the name 'Ago'? And what has this to do with shaken faith?"

No answer.

Down to earth we sank, to land in the very street in which Professor Noone's house stood. But——

"What is wrong with this picture?" My tone was light enough, but the lightness cloaked a consciousness of something faintly eery.

The scientist deigned to say, "Ah!"

Something *was* wrong. What was it? Up the street we moved, and in the direction of the house in which we sat. At a corner I scanned a sign. There it was: "Nason Street."

Nason Street was correct. But something was *wrong!* The sign, now. It looked queer; the lettering looked unfamiliar, even funny. As we passed on I noticed the roadway. Where was the paving? Come to think of it, the light back at the corner had been dim—an oil lamp! Where were the usual automobiles? What about this quaint conveyance approaching? As I lived, a horse and buggy!

Here at last was No. 129, Noone's house; but how queerly different! The doorway was flanked with oil lamps. As I stared the door opened, and out came Professor Noone himself, with a roll-rimmed derby balanced on his head and sporting a beautifully waxed, black mustache!

"Proff No One, of Yaleton," I gasped, "to the life!"

"None other," said Noone.

"What does it all mean? What——?"

The man rested a hand on my arm. "Let's drop over to Yaleton," he suggested calmly. "Perhaps there you will find light."

Once more we were over the housetops, and once more as we sailed along I marveled at the familiar, yet unaccountably amiss, aspect of my stamping ground of years. Dim and dark, the streets gave an impression of being uninhabited, deserted. Yet lights there were, here and there, and even the light of an occasional vehicle. But those lights that moved were so dim, and they moved so slowly!

These were not the thickly intermingling, hurrying bright shafts of automobile headlamps. I thought again of the ancient "horseanbuggy" of Nason Street.

Yaleton swung into view below us, and my heart leaped and stopped. Yaleton, certainly, but not the bustling little college community I had visited only last week. This was the Yaleton of student days, thirty-odd years gone.

The professor seemed to be making some sort of calculation. "Let's see. 1927 minus 30—Hm-m. This is April 30th. Well, well!" And to me he said, "Phillips, this *is* a coincidence. Watch the little play I'm sure is about due."

By now I had lost the power of coherent thinking, almost of wondering. Our ship of vision settled to earth directly in front of Carmel Hall, in which I remembered were the college executive offices. A lamp sputtered on a post by the open doorway, but the vestibule was dark. I was trying to wonder at the changed appearance of the place, when a wide inner door swung open, to reveal a number of men sitting around a table. I started from my chair, shocked out of my mental paralysis.

"Professor Hitchcock—the man with the beard! He's been dead for years!"

Noone shook his head sadly. "Dear old Walter Hitchcock. The best president this college has ever had. I missed you at the funeral, Phillips. I thought that of all the students, you would——"

"He wanted to expel me, and to write my father!" I had forgotten the absurdity of it all, and was actually defending myself.

"Ah, yes. I know. We shall see. Do you recognize any of the other gentlemen present?"

Of course I did. There were Professor Higgins, Professor Smith and the rest. I even recognized the janitor of my dormitory, although I had forgotten his name.

"Proff No One is late, as usual," remarked my companion. "He will be here presently. You remember we just saw him leave his house. Of course we beat him here. He is still on the train, no doubt. The other faculty gentlemen are getting impatient—as usual." Noone chuckled delightedly.

It must have been a hot night at Yaleton, though it was cool enough here. The janitor arose and opened the door still wider. The president lifted his long beard and ran a large handkerchief around under his collar. Even in my bewilderment I had to smile at what this operation revealed. As I had always suspected, Professor Hitchcock wore no necktie.

But wake up, Phillips! All this can not be—should not be. This ancient graybeard is dead!

The old president gave me the lie. He arose from his chair, glared around from one to another of his companions with his beard jerking up and down in rapid, angry speech, and banged his fist down upon the table—all most unseemly actions for a cadaver. Evidently his anger was increased by the absence of Professor Noone.

Like an actor in a play, the latter individual now made his entrance. Hitchcock strode over to him before Noone had time to hang up his low-comedy derby, grasped him by the shoulder and shook a closely written paper under his nose.

"Is this——?" I wet my lips. They were parched from hanging apart so long. "Is this where you—where they——?"

"I didn't get fired this night. This concerns—another. You will see directly. There—look now!"

Merciful heavens! I looked—I looked at Horace H. Phillips! I saw *myself* go up the steps and pass into that room of the past!

Again I was forced to laugh in the midst of my horrified stupefaction. So this funny-looking youth was Horace M. Phillips of Yaleton University! This gangling lad with the tight-legged, bell-bottomed trousers of yellow and the tight, blue cutaway coat! Yes, sadly; it was I.

"Come now, Professor. Tell me what this means. The scene is familiar enough. Professor Hitchcock, after what he considered the worst of my college-boy pranks, resolved to expel me and write my father why. He called me here to tell me, and to show me the letter, and——"

"And in the morning he told you he had decided to destroy the letter and give you another chance, eh?"

"Yes, but——"

"If you will stay the rest of this act you will get some light on that too."

I gave up for the nonce the effort to learn what all this delving into the past could mean, and tried to concentrate on the scene before me. I stood by while young Phillips got the dressing-down of my life. As he left the room I saw the younger Professor Noone step up to the president and begin what appeared to be an impassioned plea. Now he would throw a gesture in the direction of the letter lying on the table, and now he would seem to appeal to the other men in the room. Once he leveled an accusing finger at the janitor, at which the fellow quailed.

Finally, after many negative shakes of the great beard, Professor Hitchcock threw up his hands in eloquent despair and nodded. At once the meeting was dissolved.

"Learn something, Phillips?" the scientist asked slyly, almost bashfully. "Oh, well; no matter. Now as for that prank of yours, I always suspected—— Let's peek in a window or two."

The scene changed until I found myself on a level with the second story window of a dormitory. In the room was a young man sitting dejectedly before a table under a lamp. We paused only long enough to see the youth—Mr. Phillips again—place an arm on the table edge and bow his head onto it, before we dropped to a lighted window in the next story.

"Deak Johnson's room—and there's Deak," I whispered.

I had never cared for this fellow, I remembered, nor he for me. Rivalry in athletics had something to do with it, I had thought, as did also a certain 1897 flapper of the town. Still, I had never before suspected that Deak's rancor ran so deep as this.

As I pressed my disembodied eyes to that doubtless long-since-shattered window-pane, I saw the janitor enter the room. Deak rose, asked a question or two, nodded in a satisfied manner and handed the man a greenback. As soon as he was alone Deak sat down and began to write.

"The plot thickens," chuckled Noone. "We must read that letter. Here we are."

Just as in a movie close-up, the letter lay before our eyes. Deak's hand and pen traveled rapidly across it, tracing the words that damned him forever in my eyes:

"Dear Pa: My scheme worked perfectly, and Phillips has been given his walking papers. The janitor was just in to inform me his fake testimony had done the trick. Thought you would be interested because——"

Because, of course, Deak's father was interested in anything, however mean, that would result in a victory for his son over that of old Joe Phillips. I could see the whole miserable business now, and I knew whom to thank for my deliverance from what had threatened to be a disgraceful mess.

But that could come later. For the immediate present all I wanted was some explanation of the phenomenon I was witnessing.

"Shut it off, Professor." There was real determination in my tone now. "I want you to answer my questions."

Without a word Noone did as directed, and we removed our head-sets.

"What we have seen," I commenced, "is authentic, to be sure. It is impossible that it can be happening again before our eyes. That scene was enacted thirty years ago."

" 'Ago'—that's the word!"

5

"FIRE away, Professor." I spoke along my cigar.

"Phillips, I presume you know the popular theory as to how this earth originated."

I nodded.

"For once, the popular theory is correct. Eons ago a lump of some kind of matter was thrown off by our sun. That lump, after passing through ineffable convulsions and slow metamorphoses, has become what we call 'Earth'.

"But do you realize that every single thing—every brick, every man, every *word* even—of this Earth was done up in that ball of matter? Oh, I don't mean it was present in the form of a brick, a man or what not; but it was surely there in its component parts—its elements. If not from that original ball, whence *did* the things of today come?

"Nothing ever *happens*. There are no accidents. There is a physical cause for everything. Every whim of a man's mind, healthy or otherwise, can be traced to some tiny blood-vessel, nerve-end or spore of the physical brain. And those spores in their turn had a logical, physical origin. You say events which changed the world's history hinged on a whim? But those events had an immutable cause, because the whim did. Perhaps the father of the whim had eaten something for dinner that caused an abnormal—or prevented a normal—flow of blood to the brain. The abnormal brain fostered a different thought or whim than it would have done had the person concerned eaten something else for dinner. His dinner menu in turn depended on some other equally physical cause.

"The same logic applies to events which hinge on so-called 'chance' and 'miracles'. A man is out in a rowboat, say, being blown toward the rocks by a tremendous wind. When he is within a rod of the rocks the wind suddenly veers and blows him in the other direction. 'A miracle!' says he. Or 'providence', or 'luck', depending on whether the man is of a religious turn of mind.

"Pish, tush! That sudden change of wind had perfectly natural causes, and had been brewing for days perhaps. Furthermore, if the man and his boat had not been present the veering of the wind would have taken place just the same. A minute's fearless cogitation should convince the most unyielding Fundamentalist that what I say is true, that nothing ever just happens, and that everything has a physical cause.

"Now, Phillips, with all that in mind, consider what conditions would be obtaining here at this moment if the sun had delayed a minute in throwing off that lump of matter. Exactly the same condition would obtain, except that we would be one minute behind where we are now. Instead of being 11:55 p. m., the time now would be 11:54. But you and I would be sitting here; and you would be Phillips, and I would be Noone. Don't you agree?"

I did.

"If the sun had delayed a hundred years in throwing off our lump, of course the world would be a century behind the times. But it would have been the same old world—the lump would have contained its same old potential events. You and I would

not be here, Phillips, but our forefathers would. And they would be doing the same things now that they actually did do one hundred years ago. That's logic, isn't it?

"This Earth, with all its complication of different substances, really contains only a comparatively few elements. Out of those few elements all the material things that have ever been were made. That, of course, is an old thought. But perhaps a new thought is, that all the *abstract* things came from those same material elements. Think it over."

The old man paused, while I strove to marshal my frayed reasoning powers for a rout of this necessarily nonsensical theory. But strive as I might, I could not find a vulnerable spot in it. It could not be, of course, and yet—— I remained silent.

"Suppose, Phillips, that even as our sun once threw off a little package of elements, another sun gave birth to an identical package. Impossible? Hold on.

"I have convinced you that nothing ever *happens* in this world. Should not the same rule apply to the great assembly of worlds, the universe? Whatever caused our sun to spew us forth may well have caused some other sun to do the same thing. There are millions upon millions of solar systems—a fact I had never thoroughly appreciated until I perfected my sight projector. Among so many millions of suns, why is it improbable that another world—another not very complicated package of elements exactly like this one—could be born? We should wonder, rather, how large a number of such worlds there are. *How many Earths!*

"In the short time at my disposal I have already found several. One of them I have shown to you. The events of that Earth are identical with those of ours. Why? Because its embryo contained the same elements in the same proportions. But it was not born at the same time. The calendars and clocks there show the period to be just twenty-nine years, ten months, twenty-one days and twenty-two hours behind ours. Roughly, present-day events of that world are events of this world thirty years ago."

Ago! The planet I had just visited! Impossible! It was the absurd dream of a madman. But with my own eyes I had seen the proof. I had seen a world I knew was Earth, and knew was not Earth of today.

A slice from my past relived before my eyes! I could easily guess what that other Horace M. Phillips was doing now. That night, if I remembered rightly, I had sat with bowed head until long after the lamp had burned out, then crawled miserably into bed. What a prophet Phillips of Ago would call me could I but tell him what had taken place in my life since that night!

Suddenly came a new thought, most radical of all.

6

"I HAVEN'T dared, that's all," the professor was saying. "But since you will voyage with me I will undertake it." He turned to his cold light control.

What a blast of light was at work in that cabinet. I shuddered as I thought for the hundredth time of what would happen should that ordnance of rays become turned backward upon us. There would be one black flash, and then blindness. Death, more likely, I thought, as I considered the piercing power of the shaft. One thing sure, there would be no charred eye-sockets from this heatless light.

Once more I marveled at the wisdom of the man beside me. He had learned much from the Martians, had he? Well, he was not so very ignorant to begin with. It took a fairly

smart man to get an entrance certificate to Mars University.

"It was on Mars that I learned the principle of cold light," the professor put in. "Before that time my mercury vapor light was a constant——"

"Did the Martians give you a post-graduate course also in mind-reading?" I shifted uncomfortably.

Noone laughed. "I learned that simple trick at Facultus College. 'Facultus' is the name I gave to a particularly offensive little star I stumbled upon one day. It is inhabited solely by poly-legged, crawling beings whose only means of communication is through their waving antennæ.

"Just for an hour's amusement I studied the creatures. I noticed that the centipedish fellow sending out thoughts had both his antennæ tense and quivering, while the one receiving allowed himself to slump, relaxed all over, his eyes assuming that stupid expression peculiar to college faculty members. In a mental conversation first one creature would stiffen and then the other. This led me to wonder if thoughts were only another manifestation of high frequency waves or rays. I believed the inhabitants of that far-off world knew how to exercise some set of functions that put their minds into a receptive state for the thought rays. Probably relaxing all the muscles of body and brain, as it were, allowed this faculty to gain ascendency.

"To shorten a long story, my theory proved out. Imperfectly to be sure—as yet I wear no antennæ—I have developed a thought-receiving or mind-reading faculty for myself. That faculty is present in you, in all of us. Some few on Earth know how to use it."

Where was my scoffing? I could not scoff. My mind was worn out—I was tired. I remember a subdued chuckle from Noone, the sound of a more rapid turning of knobs, and I slept.

It seemed only a minute before the professor's voice insinuated itself into my consciousness.

"Easy now," he was murmuring. "You are awake, but let your eyes open slowly. Loose the force of your vision gradually. That's it. Slowly!" I heard the whir of controls. Presently, "There! You understand I had to reduce the light force in proportion to your waxing eye force. Now what do you see?"

"Ago," I grunted.

"Still sleepy, eh? Look closely."

I batted my eyes—with far-reaching results—and looked again. There was the Mississippi as it had appeared before, and the Great Lakes. Evidently the professor had again chosen to approach the world on our home side. We drew nearer.

"Well?"

Still I could see nothing to distinguish this sun-bathed world from our Earth or Ago. It was one or the other, surely. But no! Those scintillating spots!

Hundreds of them! Wherever I looked I could see them. Below us lay a country speckled over with a starry rash. A new United States!

"Aha! New! You bet it's new. Never in history has our country borne such markings. They are the proof that this is our goal. We are now at the point where I have always turned back in terror. Once more, shall we go on? It rests with you."

I dared not think. "Go on," I said huskily.

7

At first we judged the Earth under our eyes to be at least a hundred years older than ours.

It was when we were, as before, tracing a course above the Hudson and coming to earth as we progressed downstream, that we got our

first close-up of the mysterious spangles we had observed shining from near the surface. They turned out to be great metallic spheres of a golden color, covered with countless square facets from which the sunlight flashed constantly. The great spheres were mounted on individual steel towers of varying heights. Coming on a number of the things in a group high above a vast tobacco field, we paused to study them.

As we speculated as to their use, each ball, in unison with all the others in the group, began to surround itself with a bluish, lambent aura. The auras increased in size and density until the central golden cores shone through but dimly. The bluish haze-clouds became shot through at increasingly shorter intervals with forked, zigzagging tongues of flame, for all the world like miniature lightning shafts. Each moment the flames leaped farther and farther from out their auras, accompanied by a volley of crackling.

Presently the little flickers began to meet one another in their darting courses across the field. At each intersecting point a little ball of mist was formed, until perhaps a score of them were being wafted about between the towers. Soon all had joined into a blanket of black cloud.

"Rain-making!" gasped Noone.

He was right. Below, through occasional rifts in the cloud, we could see the tobacco plants being drenched in a copious shower, while the fields on all sides remained bathed in clean sunshine.

"Another scientists' dream come true," I said. "Weather control, then, is possible."

"Certainly. And another theory of mine is vindicated. These people are using an idea I have had for years. This is merely a demonstration of static electricity doing useful work. Those huge balls are nothing but electrodes of giant Leyden-jars. At the operator's will some of the nodes become charged with negative static electricity, and others positive. You saw for yourself what happened when the charges overflowed the capacity of the electrodes."

"A home-made thunder shower, eh?"

"That's it. Meanwhile, the nodes in the other fields are grounded to keep any tiny accumulations of static drained from the premises. And doubtless they radiate a mild warmth to break up any stray hatful of rain-causing vapor."

Useful static! I thought of how I had cursed the static only last evening when it had ruined a perfectly nice batch of broadcast from KIPI for me.

"Home radio audiences never think of static here," Noone said confidently. "The weather control people collect it all for their own use."

The shower below us was abating, the de-energized balls reflecting the sunlight and gleaming even brighter than before. We moved off.

"What next?" I breathed.

I can not hope to list here all the marvels unfolded for us in the next hour or two. Many of them failed utterly to register with me. Such things as pneumatic tubes for underground passenger traffic, aerial travel made safe, sane and commonplace, economic improvements shown by the total lack of evidences both of poverty and of great wealth—these things perhaps lie within the scope of my descriptive powers. But my mind is not that of a scientist. Professor Noone, however, seemed to comprehend the most stupendous of the prodigies, even anticipate them.

Why, one might wonder, did the scientist keep us so long in downtown New York? Why not hasten to Nason Street, to see how our familiar neighborhood would look after a hundred years? I did not wonder;

for I too feared, for all my brave words, to face anything touching on our personal future. I too was content to procrastinate.

CENTRAL PARK was changed but little. We had just noted this fact when our attention was attracted by a man—in costume exactly like that of the man of today—sitting on a bench reading a newspaper.

"Here's where we answer the date question," said the professor, lowering our eyes to the man's shoulder level. "Ah! Would you believe it!"

The paper was dated July 10, 1937.

Only about ten years ahead, then! And as for my personal future, here it was spread on the paper before me:

NOTED AUTHOR HOME FROM CHINA TRIP

Horace M. Phillips Deplores Passing of Old Orient

The piece stated, among other things, that "a feature of the passage was Mr. Phillips' winning of the pool on the ship's run for both days."

I was amused, elated—and relieved immeasurably. It was certain that I had nothing to worry about in the next ten years, at least.

Noone congratulated me heartily enough, but even in the warmth of his tone I could detect an undercurrent of chill, of dread. This I pretended not to notice.

"Well, well. I'll bet there's something in that paper about the great Professor Noone, also. Probably the world before us—shall we name it 'Ahead', or 'Hence', or what?—owes most of its scientific wonders to that gentleman. I'll bet all 'Hence' has been watching you ever since you announced the invention of the eyesight shooter."

The old man was silent. I continued, apparently undaunted. "To come back to this Earth for the moment, do you intend to make public your discoveries at once, or will you set yourself up for a while as a prophet and soothsayer in general? You could certainly get by either as a cold scientist or an ardent occultist."

I could not babble on forever in the face of Noone's persistent dull silence, but evidently my blather had an effect. I found myself approaching Nason Street at once.

How different was the street now from that of today, and that of Ago! In place of lumbering buggies and carefully regulated automobiles, the roadway was filled with little individual electric cycles darting at breath-taking speed. Even these, however, were regulated; for a strip of grass-ground along the center of the street kept the two currents of traffic separated. Heavy vehicular traffic was completely absent.

"Bulky commodities are no longer in demand, I judge," said Noone, "at least in residential districts. Coal, for one thing, is probably long out of date. There must be heavy loads in local traffic in some sections—where building is going on for instance. Ah, here is No. 129."

Instantly the professor's pall of glumness settled down, although I could see no reason for it as yet. The old house looked about the same as it does now. Surely there was nothing about it to suggest anything so very dreadful.

The first evidence of something wrong we found to be the professor's laboratory—the room adjoining that in which we were sitting. We had peered through the window, to look upon a scene of utter desolation. The dust of years lay thick over everything, marring the scientist's most precious possessions.

"Only one thing could keep me away from this room." The old man's voice was filled more with regret than sadness. I dared not ask what that one thing was.

As we stared appalled, a playful mouse knocked down what we quickly

identified as Noone's notebook; it lay open upon the floor, freed of dust by its fall and easily legible. The left-hand page was half filled with the professor's cramped writing. The notes, which were utterly meaningless, ceased in the middle of a long technical word. The entry thus abruptly broken off was dated Dec. 21, 1929. Two years from now!

Why had I assented to taking this damnable trip to a world not meant for our eyes?

"Let's—let's turn back," I whispered, groping toward my companion.

"Too late." Noone strove to make his tone stronger, less unhappy. "But this laboratory—I—I can't bear—I don't care to look at it."

Downstairs we found a family of youngish people just arising from luncheon. Afternoon here, then. An aged servant entered the room, asked a question and was answered by a nod.

"My nephew's family," Noone muttered. "The old fellow is John Staples, who let you in this evening. More friend than servant, too. Now I'll bet—good old John! Let's see where he goes."

Staples had evidently gotten the afternoon off, for presently we saw him emerge from the back door, clad in street clothes and carrying a long-ish pasteboard box, and signal one of the little hovering taxi-planes. We had no difficulty in keeping the machine in our field of vision and following it across the city and out over the rolling hills of Westchester. Here the plane dipped and swung out of sight beyond a massive set of stone buildings.

I could hear the trembling of Noone's hand at the controls. I knew he must be reading the name on the great central building as we passed over it. Why would he not turn back?

The plane we found parked in a field a little to the rear of the buildings. The driver sat at the wheel alone, while Staples wended a way across the field, unwrapping his package as he went. We followed him along a path and through the opening in a hedge. Beyond, Staples had stopped and knelt beside——

With a curse I ripped at those cursed eyepieces. Professor Noone unhurriedly removed his, and—smiled! He had seen.

A grave behind a madhouse! Such was the fate of that other Professor Noone on that other Earth! And he knew, as I knew, that nothing could alter the course of destiny, and that the same fate was to be his on *this* Earth. Yet he smiled! A brave man is Professor Noone—old Proff No One of Yaleton University.

Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Werewolf

THE belief that certain human beings were changed or changed themselves at times into lower animals has prevailed since ancient days not only in Europe but in many other parts of the world. The animal into which persons were most often transformed was a wolf. In ancient Greece a man named Lycaon was said to have been turned into a wolf as a result of eating human flesh. The Greeks also said that a man of the Anteus family was chosen by lot at certain intervals, taken to a lake in Arcadia, where he hung his clothes on an ash-tree and swam across. There he became a wolf and wandered with the pack nine years. Herodotus said that the Neurii, a tribe of eastern Europe, were turned into wolves for a few days every year.

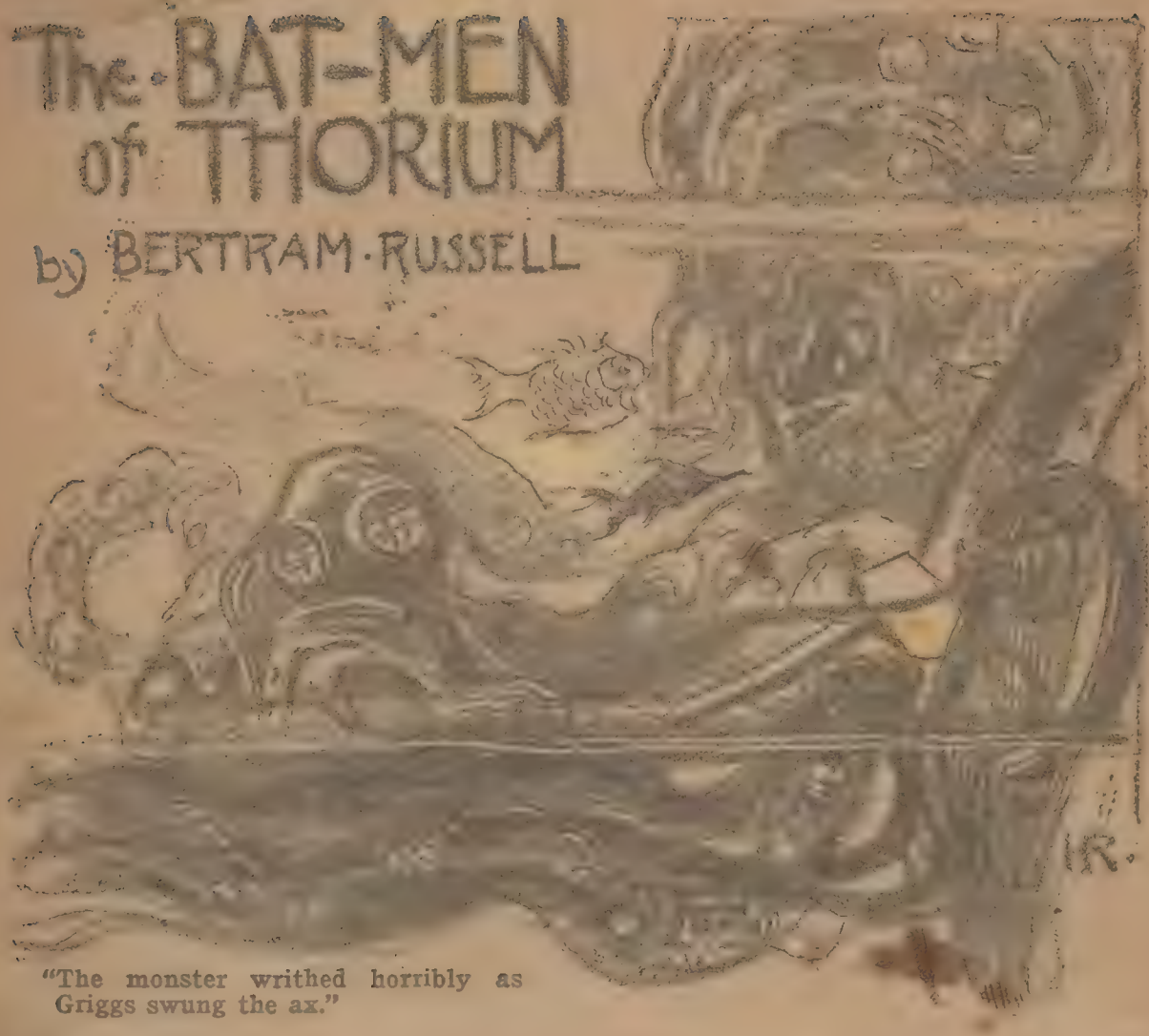
Hideous stories were told of witches and wizards who were able to turn themselves into wolves, and thus went forth to work the will of their master, the Devil, on innocent persons. The change was brought about in various ways. In Europe the commonest method was to remove the clothing and put on an enchanted girdle, usually of the skin of the animal whose form was to be assumed. Sometimes the body was rubbed with a magic salve. Our old Southern friend, Uncle Remus, declares that such people have a slit in the skin at the back of the neck, where they can take hold of the skin and pull it off like a shirt—undoubtedly an African form of the myth. Less skilful persons brought about the change by drinking water out of the animal's footprint, by eating of its brains or drinking of certain enchanted streams.

In Prussia, Livonia and Lithuania in the Sixteenth Century, the Christian bishops said that the werewolves were more destructive than the natural wolves. They were a sort of army allied against Christian people and divine law. During that century many peasants, influenced by the mania, imagined themselves wolves. There was clear proof of many cases in which human beings, especially children, had been killed and eaten by men who fancied themselves wolves.

It seems that werewolves were not always opposed to mankind and the Church, for in the year 617 A. D. a pack of them went to a monastery and killed some heretic monks. Saints sometimes had the power of turning people into wolves. St. Patrick changed Vereticus, King of Wales, into a wolf, and St. Natalis cursed a prominent Irish family by dooming each member of it to be a wolf for seven years. An involuntary werewolf could be cured by kneeling in one place for a hundred years; or you could bring either a voluntary or involuntary werewolf back to human form by accusing it with being a werewolf, or saluting it with the sign of the cross, addressing it by its human baptismal name three times, striking it on the forehead three times with a knife or drawing three drops of its blood.

The BAT-MEN of THORIUM

by BERTRAM RUSSELL



"The monster writhed horribly as Griggs swung the ax."

THERE are those who, after reading this astounding history, will say: "It can not be." To them I reply: "It is." As I write this, the hot kisses of Thalia are still upon my lips; her form is still graven on my mind. Have we not produced for evidence hitherto unknown quantities of that wonderful mineral which we were still able to preserve when the final catastrophe overwhelmed Thorium? It sometimes seems to me that the mind of the great Diegon is reaching out to me from that far-away place, buried in a fourth dimension, where we were wont to discuss the mysteries of the universe that interested him so mightily. But, no! Diegon is dead. Did I not see him pass into the stupor of death; was I not the one who folded the gossamer wings across his frail old body in the last act of reverence and love? Perchance Diegon still calls me from some other existence—of that I do not know, but my heart breaks when I think that I shall talk no more with that old man, who for centuries had fought nature, against almost unconquerable odds, and had finally been overwhelmed.

I had long known that Professor Perry had contemplated some such trip as the one he finally made, but that he had intended to include me in the expedition came as something of a shock. It might have been because I always sat open-mouthed, and listened to his every word when he made his weekly visit to my father,

to discuss the most recent theories and the latest advancements of scientific thought.

At least, he greatly surprized me one evening in July, when he said with a restrained excitement which I had never before seen him exhibit, "The craft is now complete; she was turned over to me by the shipyards today. I shall make my start next week. How would you like to take command of the expedition?"

I was thunderstruck. My slight experience during the World War had been in the United States navy, and I had even put in some time on submarines, but I had never had command of one, and I knew that the professor's craft was a submersible, and moreover a submersible of a very unusual type. I hardly knew how to answer his question. I burned as any young man would to go on this expedition, but I feared my knowledge was insufficient.

"She's very easy to handle, I am told," said the professor, understanding the cause of my indecision. "Suppose you take a run over to the shipyards tomorrow and inspect her. After that, you will know better whether you want to make the trip or not."

My father entered at this moment.

"So you're all ready, at last, eh?" he said as he shook the professor warmly by the hand. "Gee, but I'd like to go with you."

"What's to prevent you?" said the professor.

"I really can't leave my business. If I do, those Consolidated fellows will simply cut the ground from under my feet while I am away. Much as I'd like to accompany you, I'll have to pass it up. Where are you going to begin?"

The professor thought for a moment. "I believe I will set a course that will bring us in the Pacific Ocean somewhere about midway between the Samoa islands and the Hawaiian group. That region of the ocean has been very carelessly explored at the surface, to say nothing of the regions below. I venture to say that we shall unearth—or rather unwater—a few surprizes for the scientific world. They have found sharks, perfect in every way but only eight inches long, at great ocean depths. Why should there not be octopi as big as this house, or serpents a hundred yards in length? After all, if life originated in the sea, which it seems undoubtedly to have done, is it not rather more than probable that the great monsters of the deep, which are known to have existed, are still living unhampered at the bottom of the ocean? I hope also to bring up specimens of rare shellfish which live a hermit life on the ocean bed."

"But is it not too dark at the bottom of the ocean to see anything at all?" queried my father.

"Yes. Under ordinary conditions, it is quite impossible to see, even in the clearest water, after a descent of a few dozen feet. But I have provided against that by having powerful Klieg lights in specially prepared casings affixed to the shell of the submersible. These lights are controlled from the interior of the ship, and are capable of being projected in any direction and at any angle. I shall be able to illuminate the entire ocean in the vicinity of the ship, both above and below us, as well as all around. I have also equipped the boat with ultra-violet lighting, so that I can examine the denizens of the deep under its influence. It may be that they are in some way affected by its rays, as I have long suspected."

"I suppose there is no danger of your being crushed by the enormous pressures that exist at the bottom of the sea?" said my father.

The professor smiled. "No, indeed," he replied. "I have carefully calculated all the mechanics of the thing, and I have designed a craft which, not merely because of its great physical strength—I mean by that the

strength of the materials which are used in the construction of it, and the thickness of the hull—but also because of its unique shape, is able to withstand pressures of more than double those which it is calculated exist at the ocean floor. It has been claimed by some that it is impossible to construct a ship that will withstand the enormous pressures found there, and perhaps this is true if the strength of the materials used is alone taken into consideration, but we all know that there are shell-fish that inhabit the bed of the ocean, and their shells are capable of withstanding all known pressures. The fundamental principle of the submarine which I have devised is the same as that of the shell-fish. So I have no fears on that score—none whatever."

"Have you made adequate provisions for your supply of air while submerged?"

"Yes. I have almost an air manufactory. I have a liquid air compressor, and an oxygen apparatus, which removes the oxygen from the carbon dioxide that is produced when we breathe. So, I have an almost infallible supply of fresh air. If all else fails, however, I have compressed oxygen in cylinders that will support life for twenty-four hours."

"You have apparently forgotten nothing," said my father admiringly.

"Wait till Ben has a look at the craft. He will tell us a dozen things lacking," said the professor, turning to me. "By the way, here is a pass that will admit you aboard. Not everyone is allowed to inspect the ship, which is very closely guarded."

He wrote a note, and signing it passed it across to me.

It was with no slight degree of excitement that I stepped aboard the ship the following morning. Far from finding that he had omitted things, I was continually impressed with his foresight and knowledge. He seemed absolutely to have anticipated everything. Of course, the submarine was radio-equipped, but when I looked into the tanks and laboratories that were to care for the specimens that we were to collect, I marveled. The ship itself was a great deal larger than any submarine I had hitherto seen, and the tanks it held could have accommodated a shoal of sharks without overcrowding. I noticed its odd shape. It was almost round. I discovered that it had more than one propeller. In fact, there was actually a screw projecting from the top part of the vessel. This, of course, was to enable the craft to rise, helicopter style. Glass windows of great strength and thickness but wonderful transparency were set in many different parts of the vessel. It would be possible to examine the surrounding water from all angles, and also from above.

The control room rather staggered me at first. It contained devices I had never seen before. Here were depth meters that registered miles below the surface, pressure meters that spoke in thousands of tons, a dozen different devices for submerging the craft, and as many more for raising her. Forward and aft propellers there were for steadying the ship in a current, and a multitude of devices the use of which I could not even guess. The quarters were elaborate. Electric lighting was installed throughout, and I could not imagine anything more, necessary for either the comfort or efficiency of the expedition.

The professor interrupted my examination. I heard him crossing the gangplank and descending the companionway. Clapping me on the shoulder, he said gleefully, "Well, do you feel like commanding her?"

I could only stammer my thanks at being allowed to take this task of such responsibility. I might even then have remained undecided had I not remembered that the professor himself had designed the ship, and must

therefore understand every part of its mechanism. He would always be near to advise me in case of need.

Thus it happened that I became master of the *Atlantis,* as we fancifully christened the craft in which we were going to search for lost continents at the bed of the ocean.

From then on, I was kept busy superintending the loading of the stores, fuel oil, scientific apparatus and the thousand and one things that have to be taken along on such an expedition.

One day I heard a voice in a strange dialect behind me as I stood on the dock watching a slingload of rifles going aboard.

"Strike me pink if that ain't the queerest-looking fish I ever seed. What yuh goin' to do with all them popguns, mister? I thought as 'ow the war was all done, and the 'Uns pretty busy payin' reparations. D'ye figure there's a few o' them *untersee* boats still around or something?"

I turned to look at my questioner. He was a little cockney, dressed in a blue wool sweater, and was lounging against the gangplank with a dirty clay pipe in his mouth. It came to me that I should need an old hand in the crew, and I thought I spotted a sturdy seafarer here. I explained that the rifles were to enable us to capture certain denizens of the deep which we hoped to bring back with us. I told him there was even a mitrailleuse installed in the vessel which was capable of firing through the hull of the ship, and into the water.

"Now yuh don't say so? Well, I'll be blowed. I served in 'is Majesty's submarines, but swelp me bob, this 'ere fish 'as 'em all skinned. Maybe yuh wants another man, Captain?" he said, producing a handful of dirty discharges, and Board of Trade books.

"So you're an A. B.?"

"Yus. And if yuh want a good 'elmsman or Q. M. there ain't none better than Bill Griggs, though I does say it myself as shouldn't. There ain't no better brarse polisher on the western ocean than me, and that's a fact. No, nor the eastern or the southern—or in Davey Jones's locker."

"There may be some element of chance connected with this trip," I said cautiously.

"Charnce—that's me middle nime. Bill Charnce Griggs. I thrives on adwenture. Say, 'ow abaht it, mister? Is it a go?"

"Yes," I smiled. "It's a go."

At length the ship was ready for sea, and the final farewells were said. As I took the wheel, and piloted her outside the heads, I could not help wondering how the voyage would end. Could I have foreseen what its termination would be, and the adventures which we were destined to go through, would I have gone? I wonder.

The vessel answered every demand I made upon her with clocklike precision. Never had I known a craft to handle more easily. For days we glided along with that swift undulatory motion characteristic of the submersible, through brightly gleaming waters, the gay-colored fishes darting away at every turn of the screw. Several times we stopped to collect specimens of some new species which the professor wanted for our collection. Two of the starboard tanks were full of these denizens of the deep.

Griggs proved himself all that he had said: a conscientious and efficient helmsman, and a good seaman. I was the more surprized, therefore, one day to be awakened by being thrown out of my bunk. When I had recovered from the rather severe bump which my head had received, I saw that something was violently wrong. The vessel was no longer on an even keel. In fact, she was apparently heading nose foremost for the bottom. Scrambling as best I could to the chart room and pilot house, I found things in a state of chaos. Griggs was hanging on to the wheel, trying to steady the ship; the professor lay on the floor, or rather on one of the walls, for the sub-

marine was still in a perpendicular position. Instruments rolled from side to side, and the vessel was apparently uncontrollable.

"She won't answer the bloomin' 'elm, sir," shouted Griggs as I entered. This was very apparent. Quickly I inspected everything, but nowhere could I discover anything amiss. The depth meter showed the craft to be descending at a terrific speed. If something were not soon done to stop this awful fall, we should be smashed to pieces by hitting the bottom. The ballast tanks were empty, and I was at a loss to understand the cause of the trouble. The ship began now to spiral around, corkscrew fashion, and we were all becoming very dizzy.

The professor grabbed at me from his recumbent position. Drawing me down so that my ear was close over his mouth, he spoke.

"Start the gyroscope, or we'll all die of vertigo," he said.

I realized the sense of this precaution, and moving to the controls I started up the huge rotors, of which there were two. Straining in every plate and bolt, as though resisting some terrific unseen force, the submersible gradually assumed the horizontal position once more, and we were able to stand erect. The depth meters still showed the ship to be descending at an increasing speed.

"I never saw no ship dive like this before," said Griggs hoarsely. "Looks like we're all headed straight for Davey Jones's locker, and no mistike."

"Don't talk, but reverse the engines," I shouted, and he reversed the controls, but except for a slight shivering, the motion of the craft was not appreciably altered. I tried to set the elevating blades to bring us to the surface, but the ship stubbornly refused to obey any other force than that which was relentlessly dragging her to the bottom. Everything seemed to be in order, but still she continued to dive, more and more every minute. We were now fourteen thousand feet below the surface, and dropping fast.

The professor was perplexed. We started the Klieg lights, and by their light saw fish and weed flying past us in great numbers. But always their course seemed to be upward; in other words, there was no denying that we were actually descending.

"The only thing that I can say is that we're caught in some hidden maelstrom, some unknown vortex that is sucking us down—God knows where," said the professor in troubled accents. "If we could only get out of it, there is a possibility that we should be all right, but as long as the *Atlantis* refuses to answer her helm we're utterly helpless."

Undoubtedly he had hit on the truth, and I was forced to agree with him. We could only stand still and wait for the worst, trying the various controls at odd moments in hopes that the ship would respond.

After several minutes of this headlong descent, the controls indicated that we were not falling so rapidly, and we seemed to be going in a more slantwise direction than before. The gyroscopes were still necessary, however, to maintain our equilibrium. At length, our progress became almost horizontal, and the falling ceased. Whether we were on the bottom of the ocean, we could not tell. We therefore started the searchlights once more, and were very careful to examine the water beneath us. Several times I thought I saw the bed of the ocean below us, in the powerful searchlights, but I could not be wholly sure. After some minutes of this progress, the ship stopped, with a thud which threw us all to the deck.

"Gor' blimey — we've struck!" groaned Griggs, making frantic efforts to work the controls. It's goodnight now, for all of us."

Plainly, our progress had been arrested. The screws whirled uselessly, and our elevators refused to work.

The lights showed us that we were resting on a rocky floor. Undoubtedly we were at the bottom of the ocean. Fish swirled wildly past us on all sides, as though drawn by some powerful current, probably by the maelstrom which had sucked us down. But why were we stationary? Why were we not rushing along in the current?

Griggs supplied the answer. Suddenly he pointed a trembling finger at the port light. "Look there," he said, "just look there, and tell me what you see."

Together, the professor and I looked, and recoiled in horror.

What we saw was in effect a disk, about ten inches across, of superscribed rings. These rings were all composed of quivering flesh. They lay flat against the glass of the window. With one accord we drew back. It was the sucker of what must in effect have been a very leviathan among octopi. If one single sucker on a tentacle were ten inches in diameter, we could only guess at the length of the tentacle itself, and by inference the actual size of the octopus.

We climbed to the conning-tower, and from the windows we saw a sight that chilled us to the marrow. Two enormous tentacles of the octopus were coiled around the hull of the ship, seeming to stretch away out of range of the powerful lights. But, from time to time, I caught the reflection of the searchlights in the eyes of the brute. I shudder even now, when I think of those eyes. Their baleful glare was fixed unblinkingly upon us and they must have measured a foot across. Slowly they seemed to be advancing upon us, but that might have been only an effect of the imagination. The ship began to shudder, as the monster tried to draw us into its gorge. If we did not do something in a hurry, we were doomed.

"We've got to hack them legs off, sir," said Griggs. "It's a ticklish job, but if you've got an armored diving-suit, I'll go out and try my luck."

The brave fellow stood ready.

"But, the pressure will crush you to jelly," I said.

"It won't no more crush me than that big squid there," said Griggs.

"By George, that's right," put in the professor. "What's an octopus doing at these depths, anyway? I can't understand it. But certainly, if it is not crushed, Griggs with a steel suit on would not be."

"Better let me try it, sir," said Griggs again.

I opened the locker where the suits were kept, and rapidly we assisted Griggs in donning the suit. Before we adjusted the helmet, he shook hands with both of us, and then, with the ax in his hands, he stepped through the exit chamber into the water. We saw him climb upon the deck. He lifted the ax, and swung it. We could barely feel the thuds of the blows as he hacked at the leathery tissue of the monster. Evidently it was not used to this sort of treatment, for it writhed horribly as the tentacle was hewn in two. Griggs was almost hidden in a cloud of red fluid which now surrounded him. Still, by the blows, we could feel that he was freeing us. He had evidently chopped one of the tentacles in two, for we saw him cross the ship and advance upon the other. The blows commenced again. We watched breathlessly. Griggs was almost through the last remaining arm, when the monster, evidently tired of its passive part, began to advance upon us. Slowly, evilly, the great eyes loomed nearer. I trembled for the brave fellow working desperately to save our lives. He had evidently seen the impending peril, for he worked frantically at the few remaining sinews. The craft was beginning to move once more. The meters showed we were gliding along again in a horizontal direction. Griggs had severed the arm, and with a great bound, we started

forward again. He almost lost his balance at the unexpected motion, and I saw him staggering across the top of the submarine, grasping wildly at everything that offered him a hold. I noticed also that he was ducking his head at frequent intervals, as though to avoid something that threatened him from above. At last he had the door open, and after a few seconds was back again in the pilot house with us. Speedily we removed the diving-suit, and saw a pale, haggard Griggs.

"Got any brandy?" he gasped.

He drained the proffered glass at a gulp, and sank onto the settee. After a few seconds, he looked at us.

"It's 'orrible," he said.

"What is?" we asked together breathlessly.

"Why—this. We're under the earth, and under the sea, at the same time," said Griggs.

We looked at each other in bewilderment. Had the experience turned his head? It certainly looked like it. Griggs saw the look, and understood.

"Oh—I'm all right now," he said. "I tell you we're under the earth. There's a wall of rock all around the ship. Look out and see for yourself, if you think I'm crazy. I had to duck my head a dozen times to dodge the rocks above us."

We wasted no time in returning to the port lights. The glare of the searchlights showed us that Griggs was right. On each side, and above and below, there was a sheer wall of rock, that rushed past at a mad speed.

"This must be some tunnel at the bottom of the sea—perhaps a volcanic tube," said the professor after he had studied the formation for a while.

"Then, that would account for the low pressure, and the presence of the octopus," I added. "Surrounded by this protecting wall of rock, it was not subjected to the terrific pressure of the ocean above. He has evidently anchored himself there, in a place where he does not have to hunt for his food, but has it brought to him by the current. Those fish are sucked into his mouth, so to speak."

"You must be right," answered the professor. "But what will happen to us?"

"We just have to wait and see what happens. Either we shall hit something and all be drowned, or we shall get out of this current after a while. We can't stay in it forever."

So we stood around, idle, looking at one another's pale faces, in a tension of suspense, wondering what would happen next. We were prepared for almost any marvel, but not quite for the one which actually happened.

We were carried along by the current, at a vast speed, for an hour or more, each minute fearing that we should strike one of the projecting spurs that surrounded us on all sides. But the current was so powerful that we seemed to keep well to the middle of the tunnel.

At length we experienced a violent twisting and leaping, after which the boat lay motionless.

"Well, that's over, anyway. But where are we now?" said the professor.

The searchlight now failed to help us. All around was dense blackness, a thick and inky body of water, which began as soon as our lights faded away. No movement of any kind was apparent. A look at the depth gage, however, told a different story. We were slowly rising. After ascending for about fifty feet, we stopped again. The searchlights revealed to us an astounding fact. We were at the surface. Indubitably we lay at rest on the surface of a motionless body of water. We could see it rippling around the submarine as she gently floated at rest. But all around was an inky darkness—impenetrable, such as I had never before seen.

"Well, we're not much better off than before," I remarked. "I'm going outside. Help me with the diving-suit, you fellows."

I DONNED the suit, and taking a box of matches in a water-tight case, stepped through the exit tanks onto the deck of the ship. I took the packet of matches and carefully removed the box. Gingerly I extracted a match from the box, and struck it. It sputtered, and to my astonishment, burst into flame, burning brilliantly to the end. If there was flame, there must be air. I re-entered the ship, and as soon as my suit was removed, told the others of my experiment with the matches. But they had seen it already, and the professor agreed with me that there must be air or oxygen outside, and it would probably be safe to go on deck.

Cautiously, therefore, we opened the hatch on deck, and sniffed at the air. It was pure and fresh. Although this was what we had expected, we could not help looking at one another in astonishment. To find pure fresh air five miles below the level of the sea was indeed a strange thing.

"I can't explain this darkness," began the professor, and stopped, awed at the hollowness with which his voice re-echoed.

"Did you notice how strange that sounded?" he began again. "It would almost seem that we are in a great cavern, and yet it can hardly be that, for I see no walls, or roof. Yet, this darkness is puzzling. How do we come to find this still lake at the bottom of the ocean? I confess——"

"Didn't I tell you we're under the earth and under the sea too?" interrupted Griggs eagerly.

"What do you mean?" I asked, puzzled.

"Why—don't you see? We reached the bottom of the Pacific, didn't we? We got swept into a tunnel, didn't we? Well, then—where was we going when we was travelin' through that tunnel? Don't you see?"

"No. I don't," I replied.

"Wait a minute—I think I do," said the professor. "You mean?—of course you must be right! Why didn't I think of it before? Griggs is right," he repeated, turning to me. "We are inside the earth now. We are in a place where man has never dreamed of exploring—we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now beneath it."

I was dumfounded as this startling truth became more clear to me every second. I understood it all; that is, all except the pure air which we found here. That was a puzzle. There could be no atmosphere down here, yet the air was the same, or very similar to that which we breathed at the surface. I found my mind whirling in all sorts of contradictions about forces. Were we supported here by gravity, or by centrifugal force? Were we lying on the outer or inner edge of this space which surrounded us? I understood the complete darkness. No daylight could penetrate here. We should have to adjust all our ideas of day and night. There would be no more sun, moon, and stars for us if we stayed here. But could we stay here? What were we to live on after our scanty supply of food was exhausted? Surely there could not be life or vegetation in this funereal place! The outlook seemed gloomy at the best. We should doubtless perish here of starvation. Our lighting system would fail us in a few hours; in fact, it was already beginning to dim, under the terrific strain which we had imposed upon it. After that would be darkness and starvation—a very dismal prospect.

Evidently some such thoughts had occupied the minds of my companions, for the professor spoke sharply.

"Well — standing mooning here won't do any good. We must get the motors running again, and try to learn all we can about this place, before our lights fail us."

There was no gainsaying the practicality of his reply, and we therefore filed down inside the ship again. After starting the motors, Griggs took the helm under my instructions, and

we very carefully cruised ahead at slow speed. The compass seemed still to respond to some magnetic attraction—probably the same one which had influenced it at the surface—and I noted the course to be approximately west north west.

We extinguished our searchlights, intending to reserve them only for cases of emergency, and cruised along in the inky darkness. There is no such darkness to be found on earth's crust, except in the darkest depths of our mines. There had never been any light here; consequently there was not even that faint phosphorescence or radiation which can be seen on earth in even the darkest places. Here the blackness was absolute. Strain our eyes as we would, though we knew it was hopeless, we could not pierce the gloom. The silence, too, was absolute. No faintest breath of air, no ripple of wave or song of bird here to break the monotony! It was apparently a place where Death reigned supreme and unchallenged.

We had even extinguished the lights inside the ship, to conserve our power, and stood around in the chart room, in a very panic of apprehension. The retina of my eye, still excited by the glare of the searchlights, began to play me strange tricks. I saw blinding circles of light, which darted around, no matter in which direction I turned my pupils. I know it was only a reflex nervous action, but still it disconcerted me greatly. After some little time, even these visions disappeared, and I saw nothing but that dense night, a darkness which I could almost *feel*.

How long we proceeded thus, I can not say. Undoubtedly it seemed a much longer time than it actually was, but I should estimate that it was not less than ninety minutes. In this the professor agrees with me, though Griggs says it was more nearly three hours. At all events, I was beginning to notice a strange difference in our surroundings. I could hardly explain it, but it was very definite. I feared to mention it, thinking perhaps my wits were playing me false, and so I waited a sign from my companions.

It was not long in coming. I felt a tug at my arm, and heard the professor's voice at my ear.

"Am I dreaming, or do you see what I see?" he whispered in awe.

"I see it also," I said. "Light—but light of a kind I have never before met with anywhere."

"Not daylight at least—of that I am positive," said the professor.

"More like moonlight, says I," added Griggs.

He was correct. It was a very faint luminous glow, like the rays from a pale moon on a misty night, with one exception. The rays were not blue, but green in color—a ghastly green that made our faces look like demon masks, and changed every smile into a snarl.

The professor was absorbed in speculations as to the nature of the light, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. I was busily engaged in searching the—I nearly said "sky"—regions aloft, for some signs of stars or moon, when I was interrupted by a shout from Griggs.

"Land on the port bow, sir!" he cried, at the same time spinning the wheel hard over.

Reducing the motors to half speed, we cruised carefully along the border of this land—island, or whatever it was. The pale light seemed to be increasing, but whether it was some sort of dawn, or whether merely because we were approaching nearer to the source of light, I did not know.

Taking the binoculars, I carefully focused them on the land, now skimming past us slowly. I could not repress a gasp of admiration. The sight which met my eyes was one of stupendous beauty. Rising from the banks was a mighty forest. Colossal trees lost their tops in the upper air, and

their foliage was of a kind such as I had never seen anywhere before. The nearest thing I could think of was a forest in the middle of winter—entirely blanketed with a heavy fall of snow. The leaves, if such they can be called, were like puffs of cotton wool. Their shapes were as many as the imagination could conjure up. In another respect, also, this huge subterranean forest resembled an earth-forest in winter: the trees were all white—absolutely white. There was not a tree of color to be found anywhere, except that faint greenish tinge by which everything was illuminated.

"White flora! . . . ah, yes, of course . . . no daylight, without which no flora can be green. A forest in the bowels of the earth . . . marvelous, quite marvelous! I must certainly get some specimens of this. It will electrify the scientific world. . . ."

" 'Ave yuh figgered some way of gettin' back to the world, then, perfessor?" said Griggs, eagerly.

The professor was recalled from his scientific speculations.

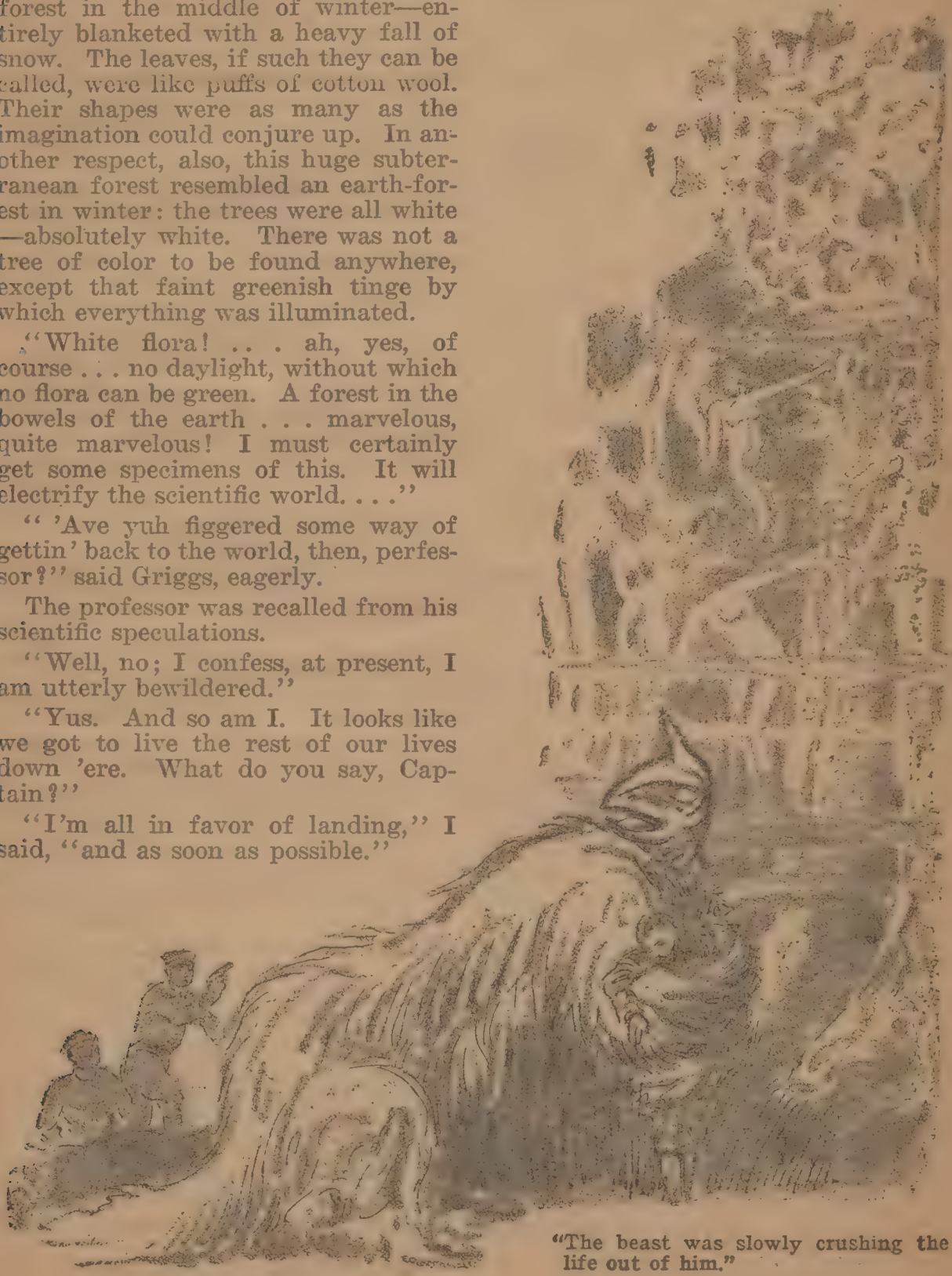
"Well, no; I confess, at present, I am utterly bewildered."

"Yus. And so am I. It looks like we got to live the rest of our lives down 'ere. What do you say, Captain?"

"I'm all in favor of landing," I said, "and as soon as possible."

"I'm with you, sir. Let's look for a likely place."

After a few minutes more of cruis-



"The beast was slowly crushing the life out of him."

ing, we came upon a cove, where a sloping beach offered some possibilities of a landing. We ran the nose of the ship against the soft sand of the beach, and opening the hatch, prepared to explore the shore.

The professor went first, and we followed. Our progress was made in complete silence, and we were approaching the edge of the forest when the professor, who in his eagerness to inspect the new flora had advanced more quickly than we, gave a shriek. Running quickly to his side, we found him in a horrible predicament. Some great ugly white monster had him in two long hairy arms, and was slowly crushing the life out of him. Not a sound came from the beast; the silence was broken only by the professor's cries for help.

"Better try a bullet on him, sir," said Griggs.

I had thought to strap my automatic about me when we left the submarine, and now drew the gun. The great bulk of the brute was facing sideways, and I had a fair chance to shoot at it, without hitting the professor. Taking a careful aim, I fired.

The shot rang out hollowly, and the enormous brute sank to the ground, dead, releasing the professor as it died. I marveled that a single shot from an automatic could kill so mighty a beast, but there was no time to reason the thing out, for a dozen of its mates came bounding through the undergrowth, and chased by this flock of white monsters, we fled to the ship.

As we ran, I heard the flapping of wings about us, and saw many forms flying over our heads, keeping pace with us. These were white also, and flew with a gently heaving motion, almost silently. In fact the whole episode had been compassed in silence. There had been no rending or snarling, no groans when the brute died—only the professor's shrieks, and the report from my automatic. Hastily scrambling aboard the ship again, we clapped the hatch down, and, starting the motors, backed away from the land.

"Phew—I always 'eard as 'ow 'ell was under the hearth—this must be it. I believe we're all dead, and bein' tortured for our sins up on the hearth there. Gor' blimey—I 'opes we don't meet the Old Man, now," groaned Griggs.

I could not help smiling at his comical notions, serious though our predicament was. We continued to cruise slowly along the coast, the flying creatures keeping exact pace with us as we did so. The flapping of their wings prevented our getting a good look at them, but their every movement was one of grace as they sailed serenely above us. Every time we changed our course, these creatures did the same. They were evidently bent upon following us.

The professor had been examining them with the greatest curiosity. He uttered a startling exclamation:

"Good heavens! My word! Another branch of the *genus homo*. . . ."

"A branch of the what?" I interrupted smilingly.

"The *genus homo*—man. They are men—real live men—but of a kind unknown at the earth's surface. See—take a look," and he handed me the glasses. "They resemble in all respects but one the man of the surface. The only difference is their wings."

I looked, and could not dispute this statement. Here was a race of men with wings, which seemed to be composed of a tissue attached to the arms, and were in some cases as much as ten feet across. The wings were almost transparent, and of a gauzy, gossamerlike texture—much like the wings of the dragon-fly. The faces of these creatures were all of singular beauty, and they showed a high degree of intelligence.

But our attention was diverted from the creatures—the bat-men, as Griggs called them—to the land. The

forest was rapidly thinning, and after a short time it gave way to a sandy plain which stretched away for a great distance. The light became still brighter as we proceeded, and we could distinguish everything with great distinctness.

"We might as well increase the speed as long as the light continues," I said, and the submarine darted forward at full speed.

She was able to travel on the surface at a speed of some forty miles an hour, but the bat-men seemed to have no difficulty in keeping up with us. Without apparent exertion, they sailed along above our heads.

"Look—they're going, now," said Griggs, and as we looked we saw them fly off at a great speed ahead of us.

"Gone to tell their friends, I suppose," I said jestingly.

Rapidly the contours of the land changed. The rank vegetation disappeared, and carefully cultivated fields lined the water's edge. The plants were quite different from any we had seen before, however. We noticed scores of the batlike creatures at work in the fields, who flew aloft when they saw us, and sailed with us as the others had done. Our progress was marked by an ever-increasing army of them; soon they numbered hundreds, all flying aloft in complete silence.

We were now approaching what looked like a city, though in few ways resembling the cities of the surface. The buildings had no roofs, probably because there was never any rain here, and the walls seemed to be rather divisions that separated the property of one from another than for any other purpose—that of protection from the elements, for instance.

As we approached the city, we slowed down to a mere crawl, and at this, many of the bat-men began to march along the shores, keeping pace with us. Still others were flying overhead. Slowly, ever slowly, we nosed our way in to the shore and to the beautiful white city. In silence, the bat-men edged away from our ship, and, as we opened the hatch on to the deck, and stepped out with revolvers in our hands, they eased back, as though uncertain how to act. Plainly, they had never seen anything like us before. They made no attempt to do us harm, however, and we therefore carefully ran the submarine ashore, and stepped out.

This was the signal for them to close in and circle around us, examining our features and clothing with minutest care. It was an uncanny sight, those beautiful white figures, with their gossamer wings folded about them, stroking the clothing we wore, peering into our eyes, and examining us generally. Thus it was that we came to Thorium.

While we were standing thus, not knowing what to do, or how to act, we saw a shuffling taking place at the outskirts of the circle. The creatures parted, to make way for someone, evidently an important personage, who came slowly to us, borne on some sort of litter, which was carried by eight of the bat-men. As the equipage came closer, we saw a venerable man, with a flowing white beard that stretched to his waist, who sat within. His wings were folded about him, and he turned to right and to left as he passed the white creatures who stood motionless and evidently in great adoration. With his lips he appeared to be blessing them, though we heard no sound. At length the litter came before us, and the bearers stopped, setting it upon the ground. Aided by one of the bearers, the old man descended, and stood before us.

I had never seen such a face. It seemed to contain all the love, intelligence and wisdom of all time. Something of this must have struck the professor also, for he remarked to himself: "God bless my soul—what an intellect!"

I had barely heard the remark, but my astonishment was profound when the old man before us shook his head very slowly, while a smile of great beauty illumined his features.

"I believe he heard what you said, and understood you," I said in a whisper.

This time I was sure he had understood, for he nodded eagerly to me, and continued to smile in an encouraging way.

"Will wonders never cease?" muttered the professor in complete bewilderment. "A race of creatures at the center of the earth—bat-men, indeed—who understand the American tongue. Marvelous, simply marvelous!"

At this, the old man seemed puzzled. He knit his brows in wonder, and the smile faded away. Plainly he was at a loss to comprehend the professor's meaning.

"Speak to him," I said.

The professor turned quickly to him.

"I trust you will pardon my ill manners, sir," he began, at which the smile again lit up the old man's features, and he plainly indicated his acquiescence. "Am I to believe that you are able to understand a language which you can not possibly have heard before, when, if I am to take the evidence of my senses, you do not use vocal methods of conversation at all?"

The old man nodded again, vigorously, and made some movement with his mouth, but we heard no sound. I felt as sure, as though I had heard him articulate the words, however, that he meant us to understand that this was so. He had fixed the professor with his piercing eyes. They seemed to bore through him like fire. Under his glance, the professor was visibly moved. He turned to me.

"He wants to know where we have come from, I think," he said. "I could almost hear the words issue from his mouth."

"I felt the same question also," I answered.

Catching the eye of the old man, I saw that he was again nodding to us.

The professor turned to him again.

"As far as we are able to guess, we have penetrated the earth's crust, and are now inside the globe. You, of course, will not understand this who have never been outside, but for the present, it must suffice if I tell you that you are, as I believe, now living inside of a great globe, which we call Earth. This globe is spinning through infinite space—something else which will puzzle you. But of these we will speak later; at the moment we are particularly interested in knowing if you have a source of food supply here in the bowels of the earth. It is necessary that we who live at the surface eat at frequent intervals; we sincerely hope that you are bound by the same necessity. Is this so?"

I had been watching the old man's face as the professor spoke. I could see that he had understood much of the other's speech, but he had evidently been puzzled at the mention of a globe spinning in space. He had now fixed us with those magnetic eyes of his, and we received the impression that we were to follow him. The eight bearers now took up the litter once more; and preceded by the old man, and followed by the crowd of bat-men, we walked slowly over the sandy soil in the direction of the city.

Everything was strange to us—the white fields, looking as though a heavy fall of snow had covered them, that stretched away into the distance, the fantastic green illumination that seemed to come out of nowhere, the darkness overhead—all was new to us. The strange thing is that we did not find the continuous whiteness annoying, or monotonous. It was relieved by the multiform contour of the vegetation. It seemed that no two trees, shrubs, or bushes were of the same species. The march was therefore frequently interrupted by the professor,

who stopped to examine each startling variation from the general range.

At length we came to the city—a city without roofs.

"How different from our earth cities, with their glaring signboards advertising the newest in penny candies, or the popular drink of the day," I thought.

No rattle of street cars here, no shouting venders who tried to sell you what you didn't want! There were what looked like stores. The shopkeepers reclined upon couches in the midst of their wares, which lay about them on the ground. Objects of the most curious nature, these were. They seemed to be mostly art objects; at least they were of great beauty, as was in fact everything in this underground metropolis.

It was here that we saw the first touches of color. Drapes of some filmy material, probably woven from the fiber of the strange trees we had seen, were colored in vivid hues—not the colors of earth, however, but the most gorgeous reds and violets.

The professor interrupted my thoughts at this juncture with an exclamation: "Can it be possible that these people have mastered the art of making the infra-red and ultra-violet bands of the spectrum visible? It would almost seem that this is so, for I have never before seen such colors. They look like reds and violets, but they are not."

The old man turned in his litter at the professor's words, but he was completely mystified. Of course, he could not comprehend the nature of light, who had never seen any real light.

"I must make a note to explain to him the spectrum and its component colors," said the professor, writing on his cuff with a stubby pencil that he always carried for such notes as his absent-minded brain might forget.

The old man seemed pleased at this, and nodded a smiling acquiescence.

At length we entered one of the buildings, by passing under a magnificent archway into a huge court. The walls and floor seemed to be of a brightly polished marble, and here also was a variety of color to which our eyes were quite unaccustomed. Through corridor after corridor, lined with the bat-men, who stood with bowed heads, much as our servants do on the earth's crust, we proceeded, and halted at last in a spacious hall, whose walls seemed to radiate some sort of iridescence, whose lofty columns lost themselves in the darkness above. Magnificent drapes hung from the cornices, thick carpets of the most wondrous designs lay on the floor. The litter was carried to a sort of dais which stood upon several flat steps.

The old man alighted, and seated himself upon this chair. He seemed to say to us: "Be at ease—seat yourselves."

We therefore squatted upon the steps around the dais, watching the old man.

Without apparently any command having been given, three servants came from one of the corridors giving upon the great hall. They advanced to the old man, and stood with bowed heads. He seemed to be talking to them, although we heard no word. With a gesture he indicated the three of us squatting at his feet, and in full understanding the three bat-men glided away. Soon they returned with goblets made of a beautiful substance greatly resembling alabaster.

We took one each, and the old man took one. He descended from the dais, and wrapping his gauzy wings about the three of us, he seemed to be blessing us, after which he took up the goblet, and indicating to us to do the same, he drained it at a gulp.

I found the liquid of a strangely piquant taste. It ran like fire through my veins, though I could have sworn there was no alcohol in it. I found

myself with a sharp appetite, evidently the effects of the drink.

The professor had been regarding the old man with a fixed gaze.

"Have you adopted a system of names in your region?" he asked.

The old man nodded in delight, and I felt him to be saying, "Yes. I am called Dagon."

"Did you get the impression of Diegon?" said the professor, turning to me.

"I thought he meant Dagon," I answered.

"Seemed to me more like a swear-word I used to know on earth, years ago," chimed in Griggs.

The old man was partly puzzled by the last speaker. He looked at us again.

"Diegon—is it?" asked the professor, looking at the old man.

He showed by his manner that this was plainly so. He was evidently pleased at the ease with which we understood his telepathic speech.

From this point on, it must be understood that any conversations which I chronicle as having taken place between the dwellers of this region and ourselves were telepathic conversations—that is to say, there was no vocal response on their part. In fact, we soon became tired of using our voices, when we found that they understood our thoughts equally well, and we used vocal methods only in speaking among ourselves; for although we were able to read the thoughts of Diegon and some others down here, we could not understand each other without words. Of course, the answer to this is that Diegon had so perfected his telepathic powers that he could make us understand the powerful radiations from his brain, and could greatly amplify the feeble radiations from our minds, thus making communication possible. After some practise, however, we were actually able to communicate among ourselves by this method, a great advantage when we were talking to Diegon, as we were thus able to understand the drift of any conversation which though unspoken became general. It is interesting to note that we did not always receive the same impression. This is exemplified in the understanding of the old man's name, where I received the impression of "Dagon" and Griggs that of "Doggone."

"I am much interested in the singular beauty of everything in your region," said the professor. "Particularly the faces and forms of your subjects. On earth we have many who are of great hideousness, both of mind and body. I suppose you have achieved this by a long-continued evolution?"

"Evolution?" queried Diegon.

"I mean that as different generations have sprung up, each has been more nearly perfect, until you have now developed a perfect race."

"I do not understand your meaning."

"Let me illustrate for you with an example from the earth-crust life. Centuries ago—you must understand that we up there measure time by means of the sun, which I will explain to you later—we were all savages, who killed each other for food, and were in fact little better than those animals which attacked us on our first arrival in your country."

"Those are the Ottars, who protect us against our enemies," interrupted Diegon.

"Well, we were little better than the Ottars, but we became superior at each new generation, or through each century, and now are, as we say, civilized, though whether our civilization is more nearly perfect than yours, I can not yet say."

"I do not understand all that you say, but the principal ideas are clear to me," said Diegon, as the food was served to us. "You evidently have not yet reached the stage where you

can overcome the processes of decay and death."

"No, indeed," said the professor.

"We have. Now I myself, for instance, have lived for three"—he held up three fingers—"for three Jopals. You will not understand the meaning of Jopals, probably. It represents our time standard. A Jopal is the time taken for this to disintegrate, and return to base metal."

He took from behind him a beautifully colored box of the same alabasterlike material as the goblets from which we had drunk. Removing the lid, he handed it to the professor for examination. He seemed to know instinctively that his more abstruse ideas would be more quickly apprehended by him than by us. The professor examined the tiny fragment of whatever lay within.

"Radium," he exclaimed. "They base their time on the disintegration of the radium atom, and its return to lead. My goodness! that is millions of years!"

"That is the way we measure time, however," said Diegon. "See—here are two expired periods." He produced two of the caskets, which contained tiny particles of a dark metal—undoubtedly lead. "We measure our smaller time periods in terms of the rate of emanation of certain standard radium samples. You see our method is quite as accurate, and more simple than yours, which involves calculations about other worlds and suns, of which I learn from the professor."

We had been eating the meal while engaged in this conversation, and found the strange food exquisite. It consisted chiefly of the white vegetation which we had seen on our arrival, though there were also many fruits, also white, each of which had a different flavor. Most startling of all, perhaps, were the varieties of shell-fish, and some pieces of the tenderest flesh, which like everything else were served uncooked, though treated in some way so that they did not taste raw.

Diegon resumed: "I was about to tell you that we have learned the secrets of life and death. My parents were among the last to die. Now, we are able to prolong our lives indefinitely. We have long ceased to bring new children into existence, for there are already as many as our scant food supply will support. We now live at peace with one another, some, like myself, for instance, engaged in the continual search for new knowledge, and given the charge of those who are unfitted to govern themselves; for you will understand that we are not all of equal intelligence or wisdom. Some of my subjects are only two Jopals old—they have not yet acquired the knowledge which will be theirs in time. Others are engaged in preparing our foodstuffs; others are the creators of music; still others prepare our decorative pieces, and so on. There is no overlapping, and our existence would be one of complete tranquillity, were it not for the Zoags."

"Who are the Zoags?" we asked.

"You will learn soon enough," sighed Diegon, while his face saddened. "They are our enemies. They hate us for our superiority. We do not hate them: we only pity them. They seize every opportunity to harass us. But two Opals since, they carried off Thalia, my beloved daughter, and now hold her a hostage against our submission to them. Much as I love her, though, I will never betray my people by giving in. I have a plan to recover her, of which I will tell you later. It may be that you would care to join me."

"By all means," we said.

"And now, you are doubtless fatigued, and would like to rest."

Again, as if from nowhere, came several attendants, and we knew that we should follow them. Rising,

therefore, and saluting Diegon, we walked slowly from the great hall.

Our silent guides led us through a maze of twisting passages that wound about the palace. On every hand were objects of great beauty. Here and there a servant paused in his task to observe with eyes full of curiosity the three strangely clothed beings without wings who were being conducted through the halls.

At last we emerged from the walls of the palace, and found ourselves in what might be termed a park. At least it showed signs of having been treated artificially. The terraces were too regular, the trees too symmetrical, to be otherwise. Our silent leader conducted us beneath trees, whose woolly foliage swept our cheeks as we marched in single file behind him. At last we found a small house that nestled against a hillside, where a sparkling brook frolicked its way to the great lake which apparently bounded Thorium on all sides.

We entered the house, which had been recently prepared for our coming, and with a silent salute our conductor withdrew. We seated ourselves on some couches which had been provided, and looked at each other. For the first time we were able to sit together alone, in comparative security, and discuss our plight. We were, I think, by this time quite accustomed to the strange green light under which everything seemed so weird and uncanny. Yet I could not restrain a smile as I looked at the faithful Griggs, whose wobegone features and rueful frown looked really laughable under the ghostly luminance.

The professor spoke the thoughts of all of us when he said: "How the deuce are we going to get out of this place? The people seem very kindly disposed toward us, and there is apparently no immediate prospect of our starving; yet I confess that I am ill at ease in the presence of these beings, who can read a thought which is actually never uttered."

"You said it, sir," cried Griggs. "I still thinks as 'ow we're goin' ter meet the Old Man pretty soon. Oh Crickey—wot wouldn't I give to be sittin' in the Red Lion down the Old Kent Road!"

"Although it sounds quite absurd, I feel that there ought to be some way for us to get out of this underworld," I said, after a few moments' thought.

"Thanks for them kind words, sir. I wish I thought so too," said Griggs, sorrowfully.

"Upon what grounds do you base your beliefs?" asked the professor with renewed interest.

When he put the question to me in that way, I felt rather foolish. I had no grounds for such a belief; in fact I had spoken rather in the spirit of bolstering up my own falling hope than from any reasoned conclusion. Yet, as I thought the matter over, I found some grounds at least for thinking that we could perhaps escape from this place, and regain our fellow beings in the world that now seemed so far away from us.

"We got here in the first place, and it seems that it ought to be possible to get out again," I said at last rather lamely. "If there is a way in, there ought to be a way out."

The professor seemed distinctly disappointed at this weak answer. He was turning away to inspect a new variety of foliage that lay on the ground near him, when suddenly, as though caught by some invisible hand, it was whisked away out of sight.

"Well, I'll be ———!" muttered the professor in great perplexity. "Wind—down here! Wind! Will wonders never cease?"

As he spoke, there commenced a tremendous fluttering. Leaves of the woolly substance were caught up and

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The Bat-Men of Thorium

(Continued from page 598)

whisked away into space; trees bent their frail backs to the blast; and there swooped down upon us a very tornado of wind.

While we were struggling to obtain shelter from the blast, Griggs had been at the door of the house. He came back to us in great excitement. He had apparently noted something that was of importance.

Bursting upon us he said: "That's the answer to our question—that's it—that there gale."

"I'm afraid you will have to be more explicit," said the professor.

We had learned that Griggs had a head that should be reckoned with in any affair of this knd, and therefore we listened carefully to him.

"Why, don't you see, gentlemen, there's the way out for us? That wind is as different from the air down here with its hot dryness as cheese is from chalk. Besides, who ever heard of gales of wind inside the earth? It isn't reasonable. No sir—that wind with its fresh salt tang has just come from the earth above us, and the way it got here is the way we can get back. Don't you see it now, sir?" he addressed me eagerly.

"Of course I do. And I can't help but feel that you are right, too," I said heartily.

"It seems incredible that we have not thought of it before. If there is air here, it must have come down from the atmosphere around the earth. It could not exist here inside the globe. Your words give us added hope, Griggs," said the professor, pointing his chin into the teeth of the breeze, evidently trying to guess where it came from.

Soon the wind died down, and as the air became still once more, we began to realize how tired our muscles had become. We lay down on the soft couches and slept.

I was awakened by Griggs some time later. The same green luminosity covered everything, so that there was no possibility of reasoning how long we had slept. It might have been days, or it might have been only a few hours. My watch was a poor guide under the circumstances, and anyway Eastern standard time meant less than nothing down here.

Griggs was excitedly running to and fro, apparently searching for something. I came up with him outside the house and asked him what was wrong. He stopped for a minute to answer my question.

"The professor," he said pantingly. "He's gone, and I don't know when he went away, or where he went."

It was true, the professor was nowhere to be seen. I looked quickly around. There was apparently only one path that he could have taken, and that led up the hill, and under the white foliage of the forest. I did not doubt that he had pursued this path in search of some rare specimen, or perhaps in chase of some butterfly that had flitted by him. I conferred with Griggs, and we decided that to one of the professor's impractical nature such a journey might be filled with danger, and therefore we ought to follow and try to overtake him as soon as possible. We therefore started at a smart pace up the hill, and under the trees. The overhanging foliage made the place very dark, and we continually struck ourselves against projecting limbs and rocks, but we did not stop to bewail our misfortunes. We were too intent on finding the professor.

On all sides grew abundant fruit, of the same variety as that which

we had been given to eat by the servants in Diegon's palace. The wind had died away, or perhaps was not so noticeable because we were sheltered by the trees. We continued our course for some minutes, without seeing any trace of the professor, when I thought I heard a rustling sound ahead of us, which might have been made by the professor in his ardent search for the butterfly. We stopped a moment to listen, and our suspicion was confirmed. That it was the sound produced by the professor in his excited chase of some rare species, I doubted not. We now increased our speed and were soon rewarded by a sight of the professor. A few more steps brought us up with him. He was so intent upon his search that he did not notice our advent, until I took his arm.

Wiping the perspiration from his brow, he stopped with a smile.

"I saw you fellows were busy sleeping, and so I started out alone to explore this place. I have been keenly interested, so that I did not

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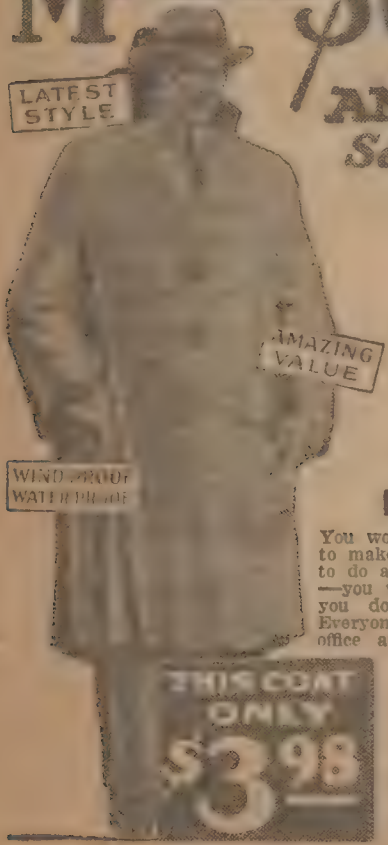

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notice the passage of time. I suppose I must have alarmed you. I am indeed sorry."

I told the professor that we were glad we had found him. There was nothing to be sorry about. I suggested that while we were out here, we might as well explore the place a little further, and the others acquiescing, we started forward along the trail, which appeared to be more or less well worn.

The professor fell into a fit of abstraction and for a while did not answer my queries. Whether he was thinking of something he had seen, or of something pertinent to our escape, I could not tell. After a while, he spoke.

"You know, Griggs said more than he thought when he spoke about that gale of wind being the way out for us. If we could only find the place whence it came, we might be able to devise a means of escape from this hole."

"Apparently it has died away, and we may have to await a return of the gale before we can do that," I suggested.

"I don't think it has died away. I felt it strongly, when I wandered away from the shelter of these trees; besides, do you not hear that singing sound?"

I listened and did indeed hear a singing sound that might have been the scream of the wind above us. As we advanced, the sound seemed to grow in intensity. The noise began to reach appalling dimensions and struck terror into us, but still we proceeded, intent upon finding the origin of this rush of air.

The trees began to thin somewhat now, and the ground grew more rocky, so that we were much put to it to maintain our pace. Only the hope of deliverance kept us going. Through the gradually thinning trees on our left hand we could see the placid waters of the lake which surrounded Thorium. We were evidently pursuing a course around the island.

After another half-hour of this walking, during which the wind blew more and more strongly in our faces, we emerged entirely from the trees, and braced ourselves against the chill blast, which struck us with renewed fury. Our path now lay steeply uphill, and we seized every opportunity to shelter ourselves behind rocks wherever they offered protection.

We were rapidly approaching the origin of the blast. It seemed to emerge from a huge black hole in the rock; for we could see the vegetation around the mouth of the hole or cave, whatever it was, bending to the rushing air.

"I believe we are at the limits of Thorium," said the professor thoughtfully, but with a degree of restrained excitement.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He did not reply for a moment, but seemed to be bent upon establishing some fact before he replied. At length he lowered his eyes, for he had been peering upward.

"Yes—it is so. Another twenty feet will carry us to the roof, or whatever you care to call it, of this cavern, for it is really that."

Griggs had been searching the sky, as I must still call it, and now spoke.

"Yes. That's right, Professor. I can see all sorts of rocks and crags stickin' out of that roof above us. By Hokey! I've got it! That big black hole up there with the wind rushing out of it is the hole we must get through to return to the world." He turned to the professor anxiously for verification.

"Undoubtedly that is correct. We must be approaching the base of a lava tube. Probably this land of Thorium is situated within the enormous cavity of what has at one time been the reservoir that fed some gigantic volcano. Our only hope of reaching the surface again is to pur-

sue that tube over many miles, climbing upward, always upward, until we reach the blue sky once more."

"How many miles would you say we would have to go, Professor?" asked Griggs.

"That is indeed speculative. It might be ten, or a thousand. Some of these tubes are twisted and twined and catacombed in an almost unbelievable manner. We should have to chance the distance if we decided to try our luck at escape."

All this time, we had been approaching the black hole. Now it yawned dark and ugly ahead of us. The howling of the gale that swept upon us from what we now felt quite sure was the earth above us, almost deafened us, but above it I thought I detected some different noise, resembling indeed faintly the whirring of machinery. The others had heard it also, and we stood still, looking at each other in complete astonishment.

"That must be the Old Man's coffee grinder. I knowed as 'ow we'd 'ave to meet 'im before we got much further," said Griggs mournfully.

"Nonsense! I'm going to see what it all means," I said, taking a step toward the yawning mouth of the tube.

The wind almost swept me off my feet, and, indeed, I did crawl upon my hands and knees, which I found enabled me to make better progress. I noticed that the trail led slightly to one side of the entrance, and accordingly I followed it. I soon understood the reason for this. The blast emerged in an almost perfect pencil of air from the mouth, and to the side there was an almost complete calm at the entrance of the tube.

The path wound still farther away from the hole itself, and I crept warily forward, my two companions crawling slowly behind me; for we

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did not dare assume the perpendicular position for fear that we might be caught once more by the full force of the gale. It was not long before we found our progress arrested by a solid wall of rock. Dismayed, we stood staring about.

"This is indeed a strange conclusion to so startling a journey," began the professor, and stopped. He placed his ear to the wall of rock, once, then twice, and each time I watched the expression on his face.

"I believe I understand it now," he cried. "At least we may as well try it out."

Without waiting to explain his meaning, he began to lead us. We skirted the wall of rock with great care, and found what the professor seemed to have expected—a turning-point. One or two minutes more of walking, and we stopped. The noise that burst upon us now was deafening, but very different from that of the rushing wind.

The professor had found an opening in the wall, and was cautiously getting through. Griggs followed, and I came last. After we had all squeezed through, we looked in dumb amazement at the sight before us. We were in a gigantic power-house. Before us were huge engines, which were undoubtedly pumps for sucking the air from the world without. We could not determine the source of the noise, for there seemed to be no steam; in fact, at first we could not understand the motive power for the pumps. The professor supplied the answer.

"By George! These people are a step ahead of us in this also. Those are radium pumps, I would bet a dollar. Do you not see the great quantities of that luminous rock lying in those bins? That is evidently the pitchblende from which the power to operate these pumps is obtained. Marvelous—quite marvelous!"

"The marvel to me is that the machinery appears to operate itself. There is not a single living thing within this vast power-house," I said, at the same time carefully scanning the entire floor to confirm the statement. Peer and search as I would, however, I could not see any living being whatever.

While we had been standing there, the professor had wandered around the gallery upon which we stood. It was an area of only a few square yards, and there seemed to be no means of descending to the floor upon which the pumps were located. I looked across the great hall, and saw a pair of heavy doors set in the opposite wall. They appeared to be of very solid construction, and when closed would require a small army to force them open. This evidently was the main entrance, while that by which we had come upon the hall was merely some small observation platform, or perhaps even only a ventilation hole for the hall, though I could see little use for the latter if there were no men to operate the huge motors.

I could not help but marvel at the wonders which were becoming almost daily experiences for us. What would the scientific world say, I thought, about a great pumping, system operated in the interior of the earth, sucking pure air from the surface? How would they receive the news of these enormous motors, the smallest of which could not have been less than a hundred feet in height, and powered by the disintegration of the atom? Even the most gullible of them might excusably scoff at such a story. And yet, here we stood actually within the hall where these great engines rolled with infallible precision.

The professor began to move once more to the hole by which we had entered. The air was too much confined for him, he said, and certainly this was true, but I lingered, my mind always of a mechanical bent,

The SKELETON UNDER the LAMP

BY BASSETT MORGAN

"They rode cattle and goats to Caldoon's."

WHEN they let us out of prison and the gates clanged shut I looked at the black face of my companion, Hiram Hawse, and saw that he was also afraid. For it was winter, the bleak, raw, rasping cold of an Ohio winter, and both of us knew it would be hard to get a hand-out, shelter, or job. The prison stamp was still raw on us. The lock-step still weighted our leg muscles. The shame of it still brooded in our eyes.

"Whah'd we go f'om heah?" asked Hiram. He had all the irrepressible childish joy of negro spirits. I suspect he was not less innocent of the thing they fastened on him than I was. But that doesn't matter. We had been caught and branded. We were afraid of the cold weather, the cold shoulder of the world. I knew only one place I could go, only one man to whom I could turn: Caldoon. I didn't want to go to him. I remembered some hell-gleam of his eyes on the day they took me out of the courtroom and he halted them a minute to take my hand. I remembered the touch of his long, thin fingers, clammy cold as a snake's scales, and his words: "When you are free, come to me, Stearch. I can always find a job for a man who needs a friend."

He had the reputation of helping

men who had "done time," and I knew of a good many who worked in the grounds of his big estate, but I never heard that they went straight afterward or came to any good end.

The place itself was gloomy and forbidding. As a kid I had clung with both hands to the wrought-iron fence and stared in at evergreen trees clipped in weird shapes—animals, men and devils. On each side of the front steps were two wooden lions with red electric bulbs for eyes, and in a rounded corner wing there was a red shaded lamp under which Caldoon sat when the lights were on. He looked like a skeleton, thin, cadaverous, gaunt, and through the parchment-brown skin the bones seemed to shine red.

It was dusk when we reached the Caldoon place, the ghostly white dusk of winter over farmlands where snow-topped barns and strawstacks and white-tufted trees stand like sentinels on guard. But they were easier to face than the creaking iron gate, the long snow-piled avenue of evergreens cut into grotesque shapes which led to Caldoon's door. And half-way down, we saw the front door open and a girl run out and keep running. As she passed us, I heard her quick labored breathing and thought I caught the sound of a sob.

Caldoon opened his own door. I remembered he always had trouble keeping servants because the place was lonely and out of the way and had a bad reputation generally.

Caldoon was not a bit changed. I noticed again the look of red bones shining through the tightly drawn brown skin of his face under a shock of thick gray hair. He wore a long dark robelike garment covered by cabalistic designs, and he led the way to the round wing. A fire burned in an open hearth and the shaded lamp was lighted. When he sat in the big chair under it, I recalled again my childish phrase for him, "The skeleton under the lamp."

Caldoon was supposed to be an artist, a painter, and his own canvases hung on the walls—dark, gloomy brown, black and green things with a spidery outlining of red in all of them, and when you first looked they had no form or meaning, but after a while you could make out Things dancing in a dark mass, or streaking along as if pursued.

I wasn't long telling him Hiram and I wanted work and shelter, and strangely enough he remembered me; said he had an idea I would come to him and it was all right. There was work for a dozen men.

We went to the kitchen and cooked our own meal and found a pantry stocked with everything you could think of—choice canned and bottled delicacies, fresh chops, an uncooked joint of lamb. Hiram laughed happily and decided if Caldoon was willing he'd turn cook.

We were eating a meal at the kitchen table when Caldoon strolled in with his long robe cluttering his long legs.

"You've done well," he said, looking at our plates, "but you will do well to stay with me. Just now I've had another setback; the young man I hired as stenographer is sick and tonight his sweetheart came to inform me that he would not be able to come. I am dictating notes which are invaluable. I can not be interrupted, but I think I have persuaded her to take his place until he is well. She was reluctant, but now that we have company in the place and can set up a good meal, perhaps she won't mind. You saw her leaving?"

"We-all shuh did," said Hiram, but I kicked his shin under the table for fear he'd say too much about the way that girl scooted down the walk.

"Where did you learn to cook?" came Caldoon's question as he looked at Hiram, and Hiram's jaw fell.

"Buffalo, on a boat," he said; "but Boss, how'd you know Ah cu'd cook?" The bacon and eggs on our plates were hardly enough to rate Hiram as a cook; besides, I had done my own.

"Of course I knew, just as I know neither of you would have come to me if there'd been anyone else to help you."

He showed us to rooms upstairs in the left wing, and Hiram's eyes were rolling. Neither of us had known that sort of luxury, the old-fashioned, black walnut furniture, marble-topped, the deep feather beds, the thick carpets and window-hangings. It was an old house and had once belonged to a wealthy family who sold it to Caldoon and went east. An antique collector would have had a fit of joy over those old things, but they were gloomy.

NEXT morning I was told to shovel the paths, and Hiram started in at breakfast. I saw a girl come in at the gate, and I spoke to her as I stepped aside for her to pass, but a minute later I wished I hadn't, for she stared, then recognized me and said my name.

"Jerry Stearch, isn't it? Oh, are you working here? I'm glad. I hate the place but I've taken a job for a week or two."

There wasn't a word about where I'd been or a sign that it made a difference to her, and yet she knew all about it. We'd gone to the same school as kids. Mamie Bunning was the nicest, whitest, sweetest kind of a girl, blue-eyed and cute, with freckles like a sprinkle of gold on her nose and a red cap on her bobbed curls. But even then I wished she wasn't working for Caldoon.

"You remember Dick Mason?" she asked me, and I nodded. "Well, Dick and I are engaged," and here she blushed as only a young sweet kid in love can blush. "And Dick was secretary for Mr. Caldoon. So when he took sick day before yesterday I came to tell Mr. Caldoon, and he coaxed me to take Dick's place. But don't tell Dick when he meets you. He isn't so very sick and he'll be out soon."

It was an easy promise to make, and, I thought, easy to keep, but I broke it. In one day I saw trouble ahead. I was sweeping up the hearths, for there was an open fire in every room, and piling on coal, and came to the round wing where Mamie Bunning sat at a table taking down notes. Caldoon was in his chair under the lamp, although it was daytime, but dark because of the trees. And Mamie looked right through me, which was all right. I didn't blame her for not boasting of my acquaintance after what I'd got.

But when I jiggled the coal and Caldoon stopped dictating, Mamie looked at him with eyes like a shot deer and said in a voice that sounded hollow and queer: "Yes, Master." It was too darn meek for Mamie.

"Stearch," Caldoon says to me, "go and tell the girl's mother she will stay to dinner and work late. You know where she lives."

"Is that all right with you, Mamie?" I blurted out, and again she said in that funny soft voice, "Yes, Master."

Mamie lived in a little house about two miles away, and her mother was a widow. I went at a brisk trot down the country road to the edge of the town, knocked at Mamie's door and gave her mother the message. And the old lady was flustered.

"Oh, I wish she wouldn't stay," she said. "I don't like her working for him at all, and neither would Dick if he knew."

"Well," I said, "I'll see that she gets home all right, Ma'am. Don't you worry a bit about that."

I made time getting back to Caldoon because a big touring-car picked me us and gave me a ride to the side-road. And I was coming by

a short cut toward the side garden when I saw something that halted me in my tracks. Mamie Bunning was sort of lying in the arms of Caldoon and he was pressing his lips to her mouth. It wasn't any mutual love affair, for she lay limp as a rag, one hand hanging straight down, and her head fallen back. I didn't know what to do, and you remember I was a coward or I wouldn't have gone to Caldoon in the first place. Instead of slamming through the window and getting her home, I went into the kitchen, where I saw Hiram scuttling around in a big white apron, going through all the motions of cooking a swell dinner. But what flabbergasted me was the fact that not even the gas was lighted, or a sign of food in sight, yet Hiram greeted me with: "Looka dat tu'key, boy! Dat mak' you mouf watah?"

He opened the cold oven door and showed me a black emptiness.

"Say, are you drunk or just plain nuts?" I asked him. Then the door opened and I whirled around to face Caldoon, and in a minute I knew it was me that was crazy, for I smelled turkey and heard it sizzle as Hiram basted it, and there was potatoes boiling, and squash, and coffee, and pumpkin pie. Well, all I could do was go upstairs and wash and wonder what ailed my brain. When I came down they were at the table, Mamie laughing away as Hiram served the meal and Caldoon looking fresher and less like a hant than before. And maybe I didn't punish that turkey and pie! But the funny thing was that when I was taking Mamie home I said something about Caldoon kissing her. I butted in, of course, and she flattened me just like I deserved. She was so mad she ran the last quarter-mile alone and refused to speak to me again. She said I lied.

Thinking over that first sight of the kitchen, I thought I had.

The next night we had visitors. Hiram was cooking all day, and in the round room Mamie was whacking a typewriter. I cleaned the walks, and for lack of something else started on the barn. It had not been used, probably in years, and the cobwebs hung thick. The dust was smothering, but I opened it and let the wind blow through, and among old harness and farm implements rusted to pieces I found a big scales. When I left the gray house I weighed one hundred and thirty-four pounds. On that scales I had lost the four, but I figured it was old and unreliable. Still, it stuck in my mind.

That night I was opening the door to people who drove up in carriages such as I hadn't seen since I was a kid. I wondered where all the old-fashioned things had been resting, and who kept the stables. But those horses were good stock, and I know horses, sleek matched blacks and whites, well-kept and fed. I enjoyed turning them into the stalls all right and wished we had feed, for the night was clear and cold, a sort of glittering blue and silver and diamond gleams on the snow.

After a while I went into the kitchen and found Hiram stewing oysters and fixing all kinds of eatables, and I lunched then and there; then I wandered down the hall thinking I'd fix the fires and get a look at the company. I wished to God I hadn't. It was some party, and I'd seen a few and heard of others. I never saw such women, white-skinned as milk, beautiful as marble statues, with something of the same dead white look of their bodies, and without any more covering than a scarf of filmy silky stuff that blew as they danced and trailed like snakes of different colors through the air. And the men were no different except for lengths of fur around their hips—young, handsome men, with longish hair like a crown of horns around their heads. And what hurt me was

Mamie Bunning sitting on the arm of Caldoon's chair, watching that devil-dance. For it was wicked. I'm no preacher, but that was raw.

Mamie was all eyes, watching, and her eyes were dreamy at that. And something Caldoon whispered to her made her reach up a hand and pat his cheek and lift her young mouth to his. Then, as if the fire died down and the spooky shadows crept from the room corners, the dancing women looked like witches, and their scarfs were gray and their long flying hair was dark and ragged, and they crouched low and flew in a wild circle with the men lashing them with whips of blue light. And those men were devils out and out then, just like the picture of old Satan they showed a kid at Sunday school.

I rubbed my eyes. Then I decided it was a sort of movie show churned out without a screen to catch the pictures, because I could see through the men and women to the farther wall. But Mamie Bunning in the arms of Caldoon was no camera business. That was real, so real that when he let her go and she saw the witches and devils she screamed.

In a second they were men and women again, handsome and lovely, dancing together, and it was then I began to wonder where the music came from, a sort of bell chime floating in through the open windows as the curtains blew out, and another rattling sound like nigger minstrels' bones, and another throb-throb-throb, like your own pulses when you're frightened.

It was terrible, yet it was pretty to watch. I couldn't move, but when I looked at Caldoon I was paralyzed. If he'd shot at me I couldn't have dodged. That was why I stayed rooted to the hall floor when Mamie Bunning stood on her feet and shed her dress and the rest, and started to join that dance, the prettiest thing in the room. She was laughing and shaking her bobbed curls, and when the men devils caught her up she squealed happily like a kid. Even when the women stepped outside the circle and those big devil-men tossed Mamie like a doll from one to the other, she laughed.

And when they flung her finally into Caldoon's arms, she curled up like a kitten, and threw her white hands to the back of his head and held his mouth to hers. I know now that he had forgotten me standing there and watching, for I could suddenly move. I tried to dash into the room, but something prevented; a wall I couldn't see barred me out, and I beat my fists on it till they hurt, then yanked open the door and raced to the stable to get a horse. I intended to ride hell-bent for leather to town and tell Dick Mason it was time he took Mamie out of that.

But when I reached the stable, the old door creaked in a rising wind and the whole place was empty. I rubbed my eyes and went into every stall. There wasn't a horse in sight, yet I had put them there myself. There wasn't a carriage on the road, either, and like a lunatic I dashed to the porch and stared in at the window.

The dying fire flickered in red spurts. The room was empty except for Caldoon in his chair and Mamie Bunning's white body cradled in his arms. Then I dashed through to the kitchen.

Hiram was stirring empty pots on the cold range and tasting air, and I realized suddenly that I was weak with hunger, starving, famished as I'd never been in my life. I couldn't make it out. But when I staggered down the hall, Mamie was dressed even to her hat and cloak, and Caldoon told me to take her home. Evidently she had forgotten she was angry at me, for she took my arm, and before we got to town I was half carrying her. The kid was exhausted, a wreck. And what her mother said to me was plenty and I took it

without a word till she finished, then I asked:

"Where can I see Dick Mason?"

"The next street, the fourth block down, a brown house on the left side," she told me. And I went.

I got there in the grayest hour of day or night just before dawn, and I had some time making them let me in to Dick. He was sleepy and grumbling, and I didn't dare tell him what I'd seen for fear he wouldn't believe me.

"I've just taken Mamie Bunning home from Caldoon's," I said. "That old devil is working the kid to death, and if she was my girl I'd marry her this very hour and keep her out of his clutches. It's twenty minutes to 6 o'clock, and I can get a preacher here in jig-time. How about it?"

Well, he told me it was none of my business, with variations, and I had to go away knowing he wanted to call the cops. But I didn't go to Caldoon's. I went down the street and woke a doctor and told him my troubles, and he felt my pulse and looked at my tongue and asked how long it had been since I had eaten.

"Couple of hours, and I've been living high at Caldoon's right along," I answered.

"And you saw devils and Mamie Bunning?"

"Yes, and she's home now showing the wear and tear," I said.

"I'm having breakfast right away," he told me, "and you're staying here until you've put away a meal. Then I'll see Mamie."

Well, I had porridge and toast, eggs, bacon, jam, more toast and coffee, and the doctor laughed at the amount I got outside of.

I walked on the wind going back. It was a cold morning, but I was warm, and when I sneaked a look at Hiram in bed I got a fright. He had been a nice glossy chubby black, but he looked gray and lean and his mouth was open as if he gasped for air. I toddled on to bed and slept late. And when I woke I still lay there thinking, and decided that Caldoon had me in his power, and I'd been seeing things in a sort of hypnotic state. But when I went to town that day with a list of things to buy for Caldoon, I heard that Dick Mason had married Mamie Bunning all right, and they were going away as soon as he was able to travel.

I shopped at a hardware store, for it was only a little town, and they rolled up a bundle of paint-tubes and brushes such as artists use. That seemed promising. Caldoon was going back to his painting instead of dictating to Mamie Bunning, and perhaps we'd have peace. I took considerable joy in telling him she was married, but the joy died when I saw his eyes. If ever hell shone in a man's optics it did in the eyes of Caldoon. Then he laughed, and it sounded like a shovel dragged over rocks—a harsh, grating sound.

Hiram and I ate a prime dinner in the kitchen that night, for Caldoon gave orders not to disturb him, and we were willing. I told Hiram I thought he looked seedy that morning in bed but he said he felt fine, and he certainly looked it. And for days nothing happened.

Then one morning Hiram didn't show up, and when I went to see what was wrong he fell out of bed and couldn't get on his feet. I tried to heave him into bed and couldn't, so I tapped at Caldoon's door.

There was no answer, and finally I turned the knob. The room was empty, so I went downstairs and found him in the round wing with a painter's palette caught over his thumb and painting a picture on the oak panel over the fireplace. He was standing on a short ladder, and the fire-glow shone red under his chin and nostrils and brows. If ever I saw the Prince of Darkness it was Caldoon that morning, but I told him

about Hiram's being sick; then I wished I hadn't.

"I'll go up and see him," he said, and came down from the ladder. He didn't come down step by step as any other man would; he seemed to swoop down without taking the steps, and I felt shivery and queer about it, for he went upstairs the same way—sort of glided up. I heard the door of Hiram's room close and then a funny thing happened. The fire I had been staring at, and which had lighted Caldoon's face, was black out. There was only the yawning gloomy hole of the hearth, but the picture Caldoon was painting shone as if it was lighted from behind, and I saw that Caldoon had been painting his own head. And such a head! Dark, almost black against a scarlet background that made a streak of fire around the features and shone through the hair and melted into deeper blackness.

And the room felt bitterly cold. I decided I'd better see that friendly doctor and tell him about Hiram, and streaked for town.

I was sweating when I reached the house of Dr. Benton, and his wife said he was visiting patients, but if I'd come in and wait I could see him presently. She was a stout, motherly sort of woman with her sleeves rolled up and flour on her hands, and I smelled baking that almost sent me crazy with hunger, so I went in.

"Come to the kitchen," she told me. "I'd like to talk to you."

There was a plate of fried cakes on one end of the table and more sizzling in a pot on the stove, and she handed the plate within reach and poured me a cup of coffee that was evidently waiting for the doctor. I cleaned the plate of fried cakes, and then I apologized.

"Jerry Stearch," she said, "why do you stay at Caldoon's?"

Well, I explained about having done time and how hard it was to get a job.

"I realize that," she said, "and a good many other unfortunate men and boys have worked for him, and almost starved to death. Does he feed you at all?"

"Starved, Ma'am?" I came back. "Why, we live on the fat of the land, even if I did make a pig of myself over your cakes."

"Where does he buy his groceries and meat, then?" she asked.

It started me thinking that I'd never known a grocer's wagon call, or seen stuff unloaded at the kitchen, which was queer. But I didn't want to admit it to Mrs. Benton.

"How is Dick Mason?" I asked. "I hear he married Mamie."

"Dick Mason stayed two weeks with Caldoon and fainted on the street. Doctor has been feeding him for malnutrition. Yes, he and Mamie are married, thank God, and they leave today on a wedding trip. He got a job in Detroit and I hope he doesn't come back till Caldoon is dead. Did you hear about the latest talk of the Camwell stables? You know he breeds horses. Well, one morning he found every horse on his place in a lather as if they'd been ridden all night at a terrible pace. He's wild about it and trying to find out who let them out and ran them to a frenzy. And the funny thing is that they were scratched and cut as if with spurs and whip. And people are reviving that old story of hobgoblins, which is silly."

My scalp started to prickle because I remembered Caldoon's party, and if the sheriff traced it to Caldoon's house, I'd likely be in trouble again and so would Hiram; so I decided to go back and tell him it might be best for us to leave Caldoon's while the going was good. Mrs. Benton gave me a bag of fried cakes and some other parcels that she insisted I take along, and said she'd send the doctor, and I went back thinking of everything that had happened and found Hiram in bed apparently dead

to the world and Caldoon with his mouth pressed to Hiram's lips. He couldn't have heard me coming, for he was mad in a minute when I spoke. Then he controlled his rage like a shot.

"Have you ever heard of reviving a fainting person by breathing for them?" he snarled.

I hadn't, but I remembered Mamie Bunning and how he pressed his mouth to hers, and my flesh began to creep.

I went downstairs myself and heated water, thinking I'd make coffee for Hiram, but when I looked for it there wasn't any. There wasn't tea or milk or food of any sort in that pantry, not a crumb, but I got some hot water and carried it upstairs, soaked a fried cake and forced it down Hiram's throat. I fed him most of them and he began to show signs of life and presently began to feed himself, and snatch at the cakes, stuffing his mouth as if he hadn't seen food in months, and I saw then that he was just skin and bone.

By that time I decided I had lost my mind, but I let the doctor in when he came. Caldoon didn't appear. He was painting like mad at his infernal portrait of himself. Dr. Benton didn't say much, but between us we bundled Hiram into his Ford and they left me alone at Caldoon's.

PROBABLY I was light-headed with the effect of everything, for I don't remember much of that day. Caldoon was in the hall when I opened the door, and he looked at me and laughed.

"We shall have company tonight," he said. "Better see about refreshments." And like a lamb I went to the pantry.

By Golly, I'd been dreaming all its emptiness, for there was everything you could think of and I started in as if I knew how to cook real food.

At dark I opened the door to the party. I don't know why I didn't think it queer to see naked men and women riding cattle and goats to Caldoon's door, but it seemed all right to me then. And the same crowd went through the same dances. The same strange music of rattling bones and bells and throbbing drums kept up for a long time; then it changed to the sound of a bell tolling as if for a funeral, and the company formed a half-circle with Caldoon in the center, and he had shed his robe. I saw the red outline of every bone in his body, like a skeleton of red bones covered by brown skin that was half transparent. There was a sort of altar that must have been the table, and when Caldoon looked at me and said something I didn't seem to resist a bit as the white women closed in on me; and the next thing I knew I was stretched on that altar, naked as any of them.

I've heard of a Black Mass. I've heard that some dives in big cities put it on for sightseers. But I've been through it and I'm not afraid of hell after death any more. What happened isn't printable. I guess I went crazy, but when I got a little sense I was lying on the floor and my clothes were tossed around the hall as if I'd been pitched out there and everything thrown at me. And my body was one big bruise and ached all over. Well, I got into my socks and trousers, and went to the round wing. It was empty and cold, but the portrait of Caldoon over the fireplace was finished. I went into the library, and it also was cold, but there was another head of that fiend from hell, Caldoon, painted on the wall. I went into every room in the house and found the same painting on a wall panel, until I came to one of the bedrooms, and that door was locked; and when I tapped, I heard Caldoon laugh and the flip-flip of his paint-brush working like mad.

I decided I had enough. I was sagging on my feet and the skin of my hands looked puckered as if they'd been soaked in water a long time. Somehow I got out of the house and down the lane of trees, and looking back I saw the morning sun lighting the red glass eyes of the carved lions on the steps, and they seemed to be leaping at me. Of course I was crazy, but I ran, fell down and got up and ran till I fell again and lay still.

Somebody driving by in a farm wagon picked me up and took me to the little hospital in town. And I was there for months, with Dr. Benton calling every day for awhile. I told him what had happened, but he didn't say much. Then one day when I was beginning to worry about the hospital expense and doctor bill and told him so, he said he had a job for me. He had patched Hiram up and got him a job, but mine was in Cleveland.

I took another name and I held that job in a garage on the outskirts of Cleveland for about three years. I paid off the hospital bill and Dr. Benton and saved a little money. I was going straight, and life began to look rosy, when a notion took me to go back and see Dr. Benton and the old Caldoon place. For I decided I had lost my grip after the pen and been nutty enough to imagine all that happened.

It was a good thing I went, even though I am sitting here in a jail cell wondering what the outcome will be.

MRS. BENTON didn't know me when she opened the door to my ring at the bell, but once she recalled me, she took me in. It was one of those warm Indian summer days with red and yellow leaves in the streets, and a sort of golden haze over the farm country, and Mrs. Benton was making pickles and catsup. The house smelled spicy and tempting, and I went to the kitchen and watched her pouring wax over jar tops and sticking on labels. She was glad, honestly glad I'd got along, but naturally she thought of the Caldoon place when she saw me.

"He's dead," she said. My heart sort of leaped, then stopped, for her face looked funny, sort of drawn and queer.

"He had been dead a long time when they found him. And he left a will giving the house and land to Dick Mason and Mamie."

"My God!" I said. "What made him that generous?"

"Nobody knows. It was a nine days' wonder in town. But of course we were glad for them to have it. The land is valuable and there isn't such fine furniture anywhere. But I don't like it, Jerry. Doctor and I tried to persuade Dick and Mamie to sell the stuff and pull down the house, but she knows the value of the place and she persuaded Dick to move in. Of course Dick couldn't afford to keep it up. It needs servants to keep that big place in order. Dick is bookkeeper for the Firebrick Company, but his salary couldn't begin to be enough, so he's doing auditing nights, driving all over the country and working himself to skin and bone. And that leaves Mamie alone in the house except for a maid or two, and she never keeps a servant more than a week. She runs an ad all the time for servants."

"They haven't any babies?" I asked, and she shook her head.

"I feel like going out to see Mamie," I said. "She was a nice kid, not a bit snifty or anything."

"You'll find her changed," said Mrs. Benton. "She has grown proud or something, hardly speaks to any of us in town, and gives parties all the time when Dick is away. The old place is ablaze with lights. You know it's up that side road and not many people pass because the road is so bad, muddy in spring and

fall, rutted in summer, deep in snow in winter, but once in a while Doctor and I drive up. We liked Mamie, and we knew her from a baby."

I sat for quite a while without saying anything. All the old horror swooped back, real as hell.

"Did they ever find out who rode Camwell's horses that time?" I asked.

"No, and Camwell quit his farm. He is selling automobiles now. There are very few horses left around here, very little stock of any kind. Our milk comes in by train. It seems that some plague made keeping cattle or horses or goats unprofitable."

Cattle, horses, goats. And I recalled the Caldoon parties when his guests had come to the last one riding cattle and goats.

"Do you suppose I could get a job with Mamie?" I asked.

Mrs. Benton spilled a ladle of catsup she was pouring in a bottle and turned on me like a shot.

"Didn't you have enough of Caldoon's?" she snapped. "Have some sense, Jerry Stearch. You stay away from there."

But I couldn't. Something, perhaps the thought of Mamie, took me out there.

It wasn't much changed. Vines turned red by frost covered the walls. The trees were still clipped like animals and men and devils, and I went to the back door, and a stout, stupid, fat woman opened it. Sure, I could have a job; have her job if I'd take it. She was leaving. Could I cook?

Well, I could cook potatoes and fry meat and make coffee. Any man can do that much, and I took the job. The fat woman departed inside of an hour, and pretty soon Mamie came to the kitchen and saw me rigged up in an apron and white coat I'd found in the room the fat woman showed me. I told her my name was Johnson, and it went over. Mamie didn't know me. I doubt if she'd have cared anyway, for that girl was so thin you could almost see through her. Her bobbed curls looked too heavy for her tiny neck to carry. Her freckles were gone and her eyes looked weird, they were so big for her face. She was powdered and rouged and perfumed, and she had on a sort of pink negligee that wasn't securely fastened, and she didn't seem to care.

She sat on a corner of the kitchen table smoking one cigarette after another, too friendly with the hired help, in my opinion.

"I suppose you dance?" she asked me. I said I did.

"I have such a time keeping servants in this lonely place that I usually make company of them. If you like to join in, we're having a jinx tonight."

"I haven't company clothes," I said.

"You won't need them," she came back, and laughed sort of queerly. "I'm going to lie down now. I don't sleep well nights. Just get dinner for me and yourself. My husband won't be home."

THERE was no mistake about the pantry being supplied this time, and I peeled some spuds and with the aid of a cook-book mixed a custard. The house was quiet and I thought I'd look it over. It wasn't changed, only the old furniture was polished and there were signs of housekeeping and order. But in every room, painted on the wall panels, was the head of Caldoon.

It got under my skin and started chills down my spine, that dark devilish face in what they call three-quarter style, outlined with lurid red that thickened to black. I could see Caldoon grin at me. Bedrooms, hall, library, living-rooms, all had it. One door upstairs was closed, and I surmised that was Mamie's room, so I took the chance to go to the round wing.

Sure enough, over the fireplace, Caldoon looked down as a fiend might look from hell. My skin puckered and my scalp prickled, and I could feel him in the room. I whirled around and started to back toward the door. For there under the lamp which was lighted was Caldoon in his chair, and Mamie lay in his arms.

Then something told me what was happening. Caldoon had painted his likenesses in every room so that she was never away from his eyes. He wasn't any more dead than he'd ever been. He never would die until he was starved out. He had lived on the breath of fools who came there to work for him—me and Hiram and Mamie Bunning. And when we were through and nobody else came, he left his portraits to hypnotize Mamie, so that she recalled him from the hell-pit that yawned to let him out whenever red blood willed it.

And Mamie was in his power, hypnotized by those pictures. I saw a play of Trilby once, and remembered how the sight of Svengali's picture threw her back into a hypnotized state. The same thing was happening to Mamie Bunning, or rather Mamie Mason. Dick was away nights and days, and the old house reeked of hell-fiends that had their orgies there.

All the time I was thinking, I was staring at the Skeleton under the Lamp with Mamie in his arms, drinking her breath; for she lay limp, one arm hanging, her head fallen back.

And I was such a coward that I let her lie. I wanted to leap and snatch her away, but something in the transparent look of Caldoon told me he was a shade, a ghost, a haunt. And I knew how he'd kept Hiram and me hypnotized, thinking we were living high when we didn't taste a bite of food for days, weeks, starving to death and that fiend-shape living on the breath of life from our bodies, as he was living now on Mamie.

I backed away to the kitchen, and tried to cook. I set the table for two. I scorched the chops, and the custard was watery, but anyway I called her to eat. She came in the same negligee and seemed too tired to care about anything, but she ate like a wolf and her dull eyes brightened. When she finished she acted more like the girl I'd known as she went upstairs.

I felt like streaking for Dr. Benton and sending a hurry call for Dick Mason. But I hated to leave her alone in the house, so I stuck. I washed up and tidied the kitchen, then I went upstairs to brush and doll up a little, for I had decided to be in at that dance in the evening.

Dark comes early in the fall, and it was nearly November. I made up the fires in the downstairs rooms and came to the round wing. I didn't need to bother there. In the hearth a fire blazed, and such a fire, green and blue streaming flames that gave a graveyard light on the portrait of Caldoon above. And sitting in the chair under the lamp, in his long dark robe, was that fiend.

"Well, Stearch," he said in the same cavernous and hollow voice, "you've come back. A good night to be here. A merry night."

You might call it merry. I remember the company arriving. I saw them riding the demon trees in the grounds, riding the carved lions, riding the wind. I saw the dance of white women with their pale silver shining hair turn gray, and their white bodies grow glistening brown as they aged before my eyes. I saw the men in wolf-skins lash them with whips of blue lightning, and Mamie joined in that circle. They tossed her from one to the other, and I was among that crowd of fiends trying to catch her, yelling like they did, as much a fiend as any but without

their strength or skill. For always she was snatched from my grasp, and in the end when her laughter died to sobs she was tossed to the Skeleton under the Lamp, and the Black Mass began. There was the dark altar and Mamie, slender, white, pitiful. . . .

And again at dawn I woke, this time in front of the fireplace, and I saw Mamie in the chair under the lamp, alone.

The windows were wide open; a wind mourned through the trees and blew cold on my flesh. There was the smell of brimstone lingering somewhere, and I think it affected me. For I was sane enough then. I went to the kitchen and found a can of kerosene. I trailed it from the spout all over those rugs and up the stairs. I found gasoline in the barn, for the Masons had a car, and I emptied that. I piled old papers and dry brush and leaves in every room. Then I wrapped Mamie in a blanket. She was limp as a rag and her flesh was purple-blotched, her lips paper white. She hadn't fainted exactly, but she was lifeless to all appearances, and I couldn't waken her.

I touched a match, closed some windows so there was a flue of air through the house, and picking Mamie up I carried her over my shoulder down the path of demon trees and down the road until we reached the paved highway. There were dozens of cars passing by, and finally I got one to stop and pick us up.

By that time the fire at Caldoon's had made considerable headway and there was smoke showing, and the smell of it. The man whose car we rode in sniffed and said something about fire, and I guess I blundered.

"You're darn right there's a fire. I made a job this time. It's the old Caldoon place——"

But he stopped the car.

"Get out," he said. "I'll take Mrs. Mason to town, but you don't ride with me. I know you now, you jail-bird. You'll be lucky if you're not lynched."

And I was a coward and went.

They got me that night. I didn't try to hide. I went back and watched the Caldoon place burn, and I'm telling you those devils danced in the fire, danced as the trees caught, danced in a cloud of luridly red smoke streaking across the sky, and when the town fire apparatus got out there, there was no hope of saving stick or stone of the place.

Incendiarism is the charge they'll soak me for, unless Dr. Benton can do something. I've been in three months, but the doctor and his wife come every day. They tell me Mamie is recovering. She had a terrible nervous breakdown, almost lost her mind for good, but she and Dick have a little house in town and he has his job daytimes and is looking after her nights. I figure it will come out all right, because she doesn't remember anything that happened in the house of Caldoon, and even if they read this, nobody's going to tell her. And Dr. Benton assures me that fire wipes out everything. He's offered to take me into his own house, if they let me off, and he put up a great plea for me about needing nursing rather than punishment and thought the story of Caldoon's house would prove it. Here's hoping.

An Eery Tale Is

SEA CURSE

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

And some return by the failing light
  And some in the waking dream,
For she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts
  That ride the rough roofbeam.
—Kipling.

THEY were the brawlers and braggarts, the loud boasters and hard drinkers, of Faring town, John Kulrek and his crony Lie-lip Canool. Many a time have I, a tousled-haired lad, stolen to the tavern door to listen to their curses, their profane arguments and wild sea songs; half fearful and half in admiration of these wild rovers. Aye, all the people of Faring town gazed on them with fear and admiration, for they were not like the rest of the Faring men; they were not content to ply their trade along the coasts and among the shark-teeth shoals. No yawls, no skiffs for them! They fared far, farther than any other man in the village, for they shipped on the great sailing-ships that went out on the white tides to brave the restless gray ocean and make ports in strange lands.

Ah, I mind it was swift times in the little sea-coast village of Faring when John Kulrek came home, with his furtive Lie-lip at his side, swaggering down the gang-plank, in his tarry sea-clothes, and the broad leather belt that held his ever-ready dagger; shouting condescending greeting to some favored acquaintance, kissing some maiden who ventured too near; then up the street, roaring some scarcely decent song of the sea. How the cringers and the idlers, the hangers-on, would swarm about the two desperate heroes, flattering and smirking, guffawing hilariously at each nasty jest. For to the tavern loafers and to some of the weaker among the straight-forward villagers, these men with their wild talk and their brutal deeds, their tales of the Seven Seas and the far countries, these men, I say, were valiant knights, nature's noblemen who dared to be men of blood and brawn.

And all feared them, so that when a man was beaten or a woman insulted, the villagers muttered—and did nothing. And so when Moll Farrell's niece was put to shame by John Kulrek, none dared even to put in words what all thought. Moll had never married, and she and the girl lived alone in a little hut down close to the beach, so close that in high tide the waves came almost to the door.

The people of the village accounted old Moll something of a witch, and she was a grim, gaunt old dame who had little to say to anyone. But she minded her own business, and eked out a slim living by gathering clams, and picking up bits of driftwood.

The girl was a pretty, foolish little thing, vain and easily befooled, else she had never yielded to the shark-like blandishments of John Kulrek.

I mind the day was a cold winter day with a sharp breeze out of the east when the old dame came into the village street shrieking that the girl had vanished. All scattered over the beach and back among the bleak inland hills to search for her—all save

John Kulrek and his cronies who sat in the tavern dicing and toping. All the while beyond the shoals, we heard the never-ceasing droning of the heaving, restless gray monster, and in the dim light of the ghostly dawn Moll Farrell's girl came home.

The tides bore her gently across the wet sands and laid her almost at her own door. Virgin-white she was, and her arms were folded across her still bosom; calm was her face, and the gray tides sighed about her slender limbs. Moll Farrell's eyes were stones, yet she stood above her dead girl and spoke no word till John Kulrek and his crony came reeling down from the tavern, their drinking-jacks still in their hands. Drunk was John Kulrek, and the people gave back for him, murder in their souls; so he came and laughed at Moll Farrell across the body of her girl.

"Zounds!" swore John Kulrek; "the wench has drowned herself, Lie-lip!"

Lie-lip laughed, with the twist of his thin mouth. He always hated Moll Farrell, for it was she that had given him the name of Lie-lip.

Then John Kulrek lifted his drinking-jack, swaying on his uncertain legs. "A health to the wench's ghost!" he bellowed, while all stood aghast.

Then Moll Farrell spoke, and the words broke from her in a scream which sent ripples of cold up and down the spines of the throng.

"The curse of the Foul Fiend upon you, John Kulrek!" she screamed. "The curse of God rest upon your vile soul throughout eternity! May you gaze on sights that shall sear the eyes of you and scorch the soul of you! May you die a bloody death and writhe in hell's flames for a million and a million and yet a million years! I curse you by sea and by land, by earth and by air, by the demons of the oceans and the demons of the swamplands, the fiends of the forests and the goblins of the hills! And you"—her lean finger stabbed at Lie-lip Canool and he started backward, his face paling—"you shall be the death of John Kulrek and he shall be the death of you! You shall bring John Kulrek to the doors of hell and John Kulrek shall bring you to the gallows-tree! I set the seal of death upon your brow, John Kulrek! You shall live in terror and die in horror far out upon the cold gray sea! But the sea that took the soul of innocence to her bosom shall not take you, but shall fling forth your vile carcass to the sands! Aye, John Kulrek"—and she spoke with such a terrible intensity that the drunken mockery on the man's face changed to one of swinish stupidity—"the sea roars for the victim it will not keep! There is snow upon the hills, John Kulrek, and ere it melts your corpse will lie at my feet. And I shall spit upon it and be content."

KULREK and his crony sailed at dawn for a long voyage, and Moll went back to her hut and her clam gathering. She seemed to grow leaner and more grim than ever and her eyes smoldered with a light not sane. The days glided by and people whispered among themselves that Moll's days were numbered, for she faded to a ghost of a woman; but she went her way, refusing all aid.

That was a short, cold summer and the snow on the barren inland hills never melted; a thing very unusual, which caused much comment among the villagers. At dusk and at dawn Moll would come up on the beach, gaze up at the snow which glittered on the hills, then out to sea with a fierce intensity in her gaze.

Then the days grew shorter, the nights longer and darker, and the cold gray tides came sweeping along the bleak strands, bearing the rain and sleet of the sharp east breezes.

And upon a bleak day a trading-vessel sailed into the bay and an-

chored. And all the idlers and the wastrels flocked to the wharfs, for that was the ship upon which John Kulrek and Lie-lip Canool had sailed. Down the gang-plank came Lie-lip, more furtive than ever, but John Kulrek was not there.

To shouted queries, Canool shook his head. "Kulrek deserted ship at a port of Sumatra," said he. "He had a row with the skipper, lads; wanted me to desert, too, but no! I had to see you fine lads again, eh, boys?"

Almost cringing was Lie-lip Canool, and suddenly he recoiled as Moll Farrell came through the throng. A moment they stood eyeing each other; then Moll's grim lips bent in a terrible smile.

"There's blood on your hand, Canool!" she lashed out suddenly—so suddenly that Lie-lip started and rubbed his right hand across his left sleeve.

"Stand aside, witch!" he snarled in sudden anger, striding through the crowd which gave back for him. His admirers followed him to the tavern.

Now, I mind that the next day was even colder; gray fogs came drifting out of the east and veiled the sea and the beaches. There would be no sailing that day, and so all the villagers were in their snug houses or matching tales at the tavern. So it came about that Joe, my friend, a lad of my own age, and I, were the ones who saw the first of the strange thing that happened.

Being harum-scarum lads of no wisdom, we were sitting in a small rowboat, floating at the end of the wharfs, each shivering and wishing the other would suggest leaving, there being no reason whatever for our being there, save that it was a good place to build air-castles undisturbed.

Suddenly Joe raised his hand. "Say," he said, "d'ye hear? Who can be out on the bay upon a day like this?"

"Nobody. What d'ye hear?"

"Oars. Or I'm a lubber. Listen."

There was no seeing anything in that fog, and I heard nothing. Yet Joe swore he did, and suddenly his face assumed a strange look.

"Somebody rowing out there, I tell you! The bay is alive with oars from the sound! A score of boats at the least! Ye dolt, can ye not hear?"

Then, as I shook my head, he leaped and began to undo the painter.

"I'm off to see. Name me liar if the bay is not full of boats, all together like a close fleet. Are you with me?"

Yes, I was with him, though I heard nothing. Then out in the grayness we went, and the fog closed behind and before so that we drifted in a vague world of smoke, seeing naught and hearing naught. We were lost in no time, and I cursed Joe for leading us upon a wild goose chase that was like to end with our being swept out to sea. I thought of Moll Farrell's girl and shuddered.

How long we drifted I know not. Minutes faded into hours, hours into centuries. Still Joe swore he heard the oars, now close at hand, now far away, and for hours we followed them, steering our course toward the sound, as the noise grew or receded. This I later thought of, and could not understand.

Then, when my hands were so numb that I could no longer hold the oar, and the forerunning drowsiness of cold and exhaustion was stealing over me, bleak white stars broke through the fog which glided suddenly away, fading like a ghost of smoke, and we found ourselves afloat just outside the mouth of the bay. The waters lay smooth as a pond, all dark green and silver in the starlight, and the cold came crisper than ever. I was swinging the boat about, to put back into the bay, when Joe gave a shout, and for the first time I heard

the clack of oar-locks. I glanced over my shoulder and my blood went cold.

A great beaked prow loomed above us, a weird, unfamiliar shape against the stars, and as I caught my breath, sheered sharply and swept by us, with a curious swishing I never heard any other craft make. Joe screamed and backed oars frantically, and the boat walled out of the way just in time; for though the prow had missed us, still otherwise we had died. For from the sides of the ship stood long oars, bank upon bank which swept her along. Though I had never seen such a craft, I knew her for a galley. But what was she doing upon our coasts? They said, the far-farers, that such ships were still in use among the heathens of Barbary; but it was many a long, heaving mile to Barbary, and even so she did not resemble the ships described by those who had sailed far.

We started in pursuit, and this was strange, for though the waters broke about her prow, and she seemed fairly to fly through the waves, yet she was making little speed, and it was no time before we caught up with her. Making our painter fast to a chain far back beyond the reach of the swishing oars, we hailed those on deck. But there came no answer, and at last, conquering our fears, we clambered up the chain and found ourselves upon the strangest deck man has trod for many a long, roaring century.

"This is no Barbary rover!" muttered Joe fearsomely. "Look, how old it seems! Almost ready to fall to pieces. Why, 'tis fairly rotten!"

There was no one on deck, no one at the long sweep with which the craft was steered. We stole to the hold and looked down the stair. Then and there, if ever men were on the verge of insanity, it was we. For there were rowers there, it is true; they sat upon the rowers' benches and drove the creaking oars through the gray waters. *And they that rowed were skeletons!*

Shrieking, we plunged across the deck, to fling ourselves into the sea. But at the rail I tripped upon something and fell headlong, and as I lay, I saw a thing which vanquished my fear of the horrors below for an instant. The thing upon which I had tripped was a human body, and in the dim gray light that was beginning to steal across the eastern waves I saw a dagger hilt standing up between his shoulders. Joe was at the rail, urging me to haste, and together we slid down the chain and cut the painter.

Then we stood off into the bay. Straight on kept the grim galley, and we followed, slowly, wondering. She seemed to be heading straight for the beach beside the wharfs, and as we approached, we saw the wharfs thronged with people. They had missed us, no doubt, and now they stood, there in the early dawn light, struck dumb by the apparition which had come up out the night and the grim ocean.

Straight on swept the galley, her oars a-swish; then ere she reached the shallow water—crash!—a terrific reverberation shook the bay. Before our eyes the grim craft seemed to melt away; then she vanished, and the green waters seethed where she had ridden, but there floated no driftwood there, nor did there ever float any ashore. Aye, something floated ashore, but it was grim driftwood!

We made the landing amid a hum of excited conversation that stopped suddenly. Moll Farrell stood before her hut, limned gauntly against the ghostly dawn, her lean hand pointing seaward. And across the sighing wet sands, borne by the gray tide, something came floating; something that the waves

dropped at Moll Farrell's feet. And there looked up at us, as we crowded about, a pair of unseeing eyes set in a still, white face. John Kulrek had come home.

Still and grim he lay, rocked by the tide, and as he lurched sideways, all saw the dagger hilt that stood from his back—the dagger all of us had seen a thousand times at the belt of Lie-lip Canool.

"Aye, I killed him!" came Canool's shriek, as he writhed and groveled before our gaze. "At sea on a still night in a drunken brawl I slew him and hurled him overboard! And from the far seas he has followed me"—his voice sank to a hideous whisper—"because—of—the—curse—the—sea—would—not—keep—his—body!"

And the wretch sank down, trembling, the shadow of the gallows already in his eyes.

"Aye!" Strong, deep and exultant was Moll Farrell's voice. "From the hell of lost craft Satan sent a ship of bygone ages! A ship red with gore and stained with the memory of horrid crimes! None other would bear such a vile carcass! The sea has taken vengeance and has given me mine. See now, how I spit upon the face of John Kulrek."

And with a ghastly laugh, she pitched forward, the blood starting to her lips. And the sun came up across the restless sea.

A Tale of Pagan Worship

RIDERS IN THE SKY

By MARC R. SCHORER and AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE following manuscript was found in the temple of the Moon God, Sin, in the ancient city of Ur on the lower Euphrates, by a searching party sent out to discover traces of the vanished expedition of Dr. James Marlowe. It is obviously the diary of Dr. Fenton, Dr. Marlowe's assistant on the expedition:

August 17. We arrived here today, but without our native helpers. Curiously enough, they refused to accompany us to the site of Ur. We are rather at a loss without them, and our excavations must consequently be limited. We will, however, go ahead with the work.

August 27. We have started excavation upon a mount, beneath which we hope to find the ancient temple of Sin, the Moon God, whose chief shrine, Rawlinson says, was at Ur, the city being under the special protection of the Moon God.

September 11. Dr. Marlowe has been unable to get native aid from the surrounding region. For some reason they fear this place.

October 7. We have at last uncovered the temple of Sin, and have cleared quite a space before the temple. All indications point to the reign of Cherdorloamer of the Elamitic dynasty, who reigned at Ur in 1976 B. C., during the greatest power of the ancient Chaldean kingdom of

Ur. The temple is characteristic of those found at Borsippa and Calah, but infinitely larger. The crescent, symbol of Sin, and the eight-rayed disk, symbol of Ai, the Moon Goddess, who presides over life, are present side by side on the high altar.

There is a huge, overturned table before the altar, which we have every reason to believe is a sacrificial table. Tomorrow we shall attempt to raise it.

October 8. Some of our expedition here played a practical joke on us last night. This morning the sacrificial table was set up; so were a number of images of Ai and Sin. The table seemed particularly weighty to us, and it must have taken much effort to set it upright.

Later. Our men consistently deny any hand in the raising of the table, but it is ridiculous to do so. Dr. Marlowe insists on an admission of participation in the affair, but I fear he is doomed to disappointment. It strikes me most peculiarly that the men hold to their view. Surely the table did not lift itself, as they would have us believe!

October 9. There is a strong current of unrest among the men. It must be the affair of the sacrificial table that is so stirring them up; so far no one has admitted a hand in the matter.

Later. Dr. Marlowe is furious. Someone has been at work in the temple, and has uncovered a treasure beneath the altar. It consists mainly of sacrificial vessels in silver, copper, bronze, and beaten gold, very similar to those discovered at Mycenæ by Dr. Schliemann. This discovery has spread among the men, and Dr. Marlowe suspects the existence of a conspiracy to get hold of the treasure. I am prone to agree with him, for there is no telling what men will do in practical isolation such as this. It would be comparatively easy to escape with the treasure to the Euphrates, which lies not far from here. However, I do not believe there is any immediate danger.

October 10. Our men threatened to leave us today. No mention was made of the treasure of Sin, but there was a strong complaint of the sacrificial table affair and of another matter, which the men claim has bothered them since the excavating of the table was finished. It concerns strange noises in the night, of which the men show an almost superstitious fear. They insist that they have heard noises, as of riders in the dark. A great army, they say. This is strange. Personally, I give it no credence, but Dr. Marlowe is struck by it. There is no road within hearing distance, and when I told the men so, they said that the noises did not come from afar, but from near by. This irritated Dr. Marlowe still more, but it appears to me utterly ridiculous. I dismissed them curtly.

October 11. As I feared, the men have deserted with the treasure. Dr. Marlowe says nothing; he is thinking of the advisability of deserting the excavating. But he will never do it.

Later. Dr. Marlowe asked me whether I had heard anything during the night, and when I said I had not, he dismissed the matter.

October 12. Dr. Marlowe seems to have forgotten the desertion of yesterday. He is troubled about something, and has spent his time wandering absently about the excavations.

Later. Dr. Marlowe confided that he had heard riders during the night. "A great beating of hoofs, Fenton," he said, "and if it does not sound too fantastic, of wings." I told him that I had heard nothing, but as I am considerably removed from his tent, it is not unnatural. Dr. Marlowe is situated to one side of the temple. Tonight I shall move to his tent.

OCTOBER 13. There is no doubt of it! There is an army of riders somewhere near, and somewhere there is a great flapping of wings. It was perfectly clear to both Dr. Marlowe and me last night. We left our tent and ventured into the darkness of Ur, but saw nothing. We will watch tonight. Dr. Marlowe says there will be a moon in an unclouded sky; last night, and for some days before, the sky has been overcast, though it is the period of the full moon.

October 14. We watched last night. But I concede nothing we saw! The only explanation of what occurred is that we must have fallen asleep. I remember suddenly hearing, with a great rush and swirl of air, the beating hoofs of a vast army, and the flapping of strange wings.

Suddenly there swept into clear view in the moonlight a great mass of purple things that came from nowhere, from space—from the outermost cosmos. They swept from the sky into the space before the temple, and from there into the interior of the shrine of Sin and Ai, where we followed them at a discreet distance. The crescent of Sin on the high altar shone like fire, and before it were the purple things, undulating in a great mass of fearful grotesques, neither men nor beasts, but a horrible mixture of both, with awful travesties on human faces. They had no arms, but great wings like bats, with long tendrils lashing to and fro like gigantic cilia. Backward and forward this formless mass undulated, amid a low throbbing murmur, worshiping the shining crescent of the Moon God, Sin. A number of the grotesque creatures slithered over the sacrificial stone, and sank down upon its surface in fleshless masses.

This worship continued for long hours, until the red and gray of dawn shone in the east. Then slowly, gathering volume, began that sound of beating hoofs and flapping wings. And the foremost of the purple things began to rise slowly in the air toward the great square opening in the roof of the temple just above the sacrificial table. It was followed by the rest, in a long purple line of formlessness. As suddenly as they had come, so they were gone, and Dr. Marlowe and I were left alone.

I am not willing to believe that this was other than an hallucination. Dr. Marlowe, however, disagrees with me; he bases his opinion on the study of ancient fetishism that he has made. As tonight is the night of the full moon, we are to watch again.

Later. Dr. Marlowe has given up all attempts to identify the purple things. He is convinced that they are from another earth, and is satisfied to call them "moon creatures." Beyond the fact that they worship Sin, he does not attempt to explain their presence in the city of Ur.

Approaching Midnight. We are seated in the temple somewhat left of the sacrificial table, in a small enclosed space shrouded in darkness. I have brought my diary along, to record all that happens tonight. There is a huge patch of moonlight on the floor of the temple that comes from the opening in the roof.

I can dimly hear the hoofbeats in the sky, and the flapping of wings. There is a formless shadow in the moonlight on the floor. Dr. Marlowe, too, hears them coming.

The crescent of Sin is beginning to glow, and—yes, the disk of Ai is glowing also! The purple things are entering the temple as before. Some of them drop from the opening in the center of the roof. There is a certain systematic assemblage of their ranks as they supplicate before the glowing emblems on the high altar. The same low murmuring sound rises from their midst, and the tendrils of their bat-wings lash the air in rhythmic motion. The mass of moon creatures undulates backward and forward.

A few of the creatures are slithering toward the sacrificial table. They climb to its flat surface, continuing to bow before the altar. It is almost as if these purple things led the mass of others. They are turning now, and the undulating movement is slowly ceasing. The murmuring, too, is gone. The three things on the table lash their tendrils in unison; those of the mass are silent. It is from these tendrils that comes the low humming sound I hear.

There is a lull in the tendrils of the three, and a murmur as of assent from the mass. The moon creatures are slowly altering their position, so that they are now facing us. I wonder if we are as perceptible to them as they are to us.

The three on the table are extending their tendrils toward us, and the humming sound again becomes audible. The sound is increasing in intensity; it seems to be affecting Dr. Marlowe.

Dr. Marlowe is rising and going slowly toward the three on the sacrificial table. . . . I called to him, but he did not answer. It is almost as if he were hypnotized. . . . Perhaps he wishes to observe these peculiar purple creatures at closer quarters? . . . But no, he has mounted the table, amid a humming sound from the mass, which is now moving toward him. He is surrounded by these things, but he does not cry out. . . . The purple things are building a pyramid of their bodies—a pyramid that reaches to the opening in the roof and beyond. Vivid flashes of fire come from the glowing emblems on the altar. A blinding flash of light, and the pyramid of bodies crumbles; unhurt, the creatures are reorganizing, and all is as before. But no! Dr. Marlowe is gone!

The three on the table turn again toward me; their tendrils are extending, and I am beginning to feel drowsy.

My God! Dr. Marlowe and I have been sitting in the place reserved for sacrifices to the Moon God! It was Dr. Marlowe who graced the top of that sacrificial pyramid of purple things.

The ghastly humming is beginning again. . . . I can feel the power of those tendrils, drawing me onward . . . onward, outward . . . into cosmos.

The humming is very loud. I wonder where Dr. Marlowe is, and what I am doing here. Glory in the highest to the Great God, Sin! I no longer want to write . . . I am the chosen of Sin's.

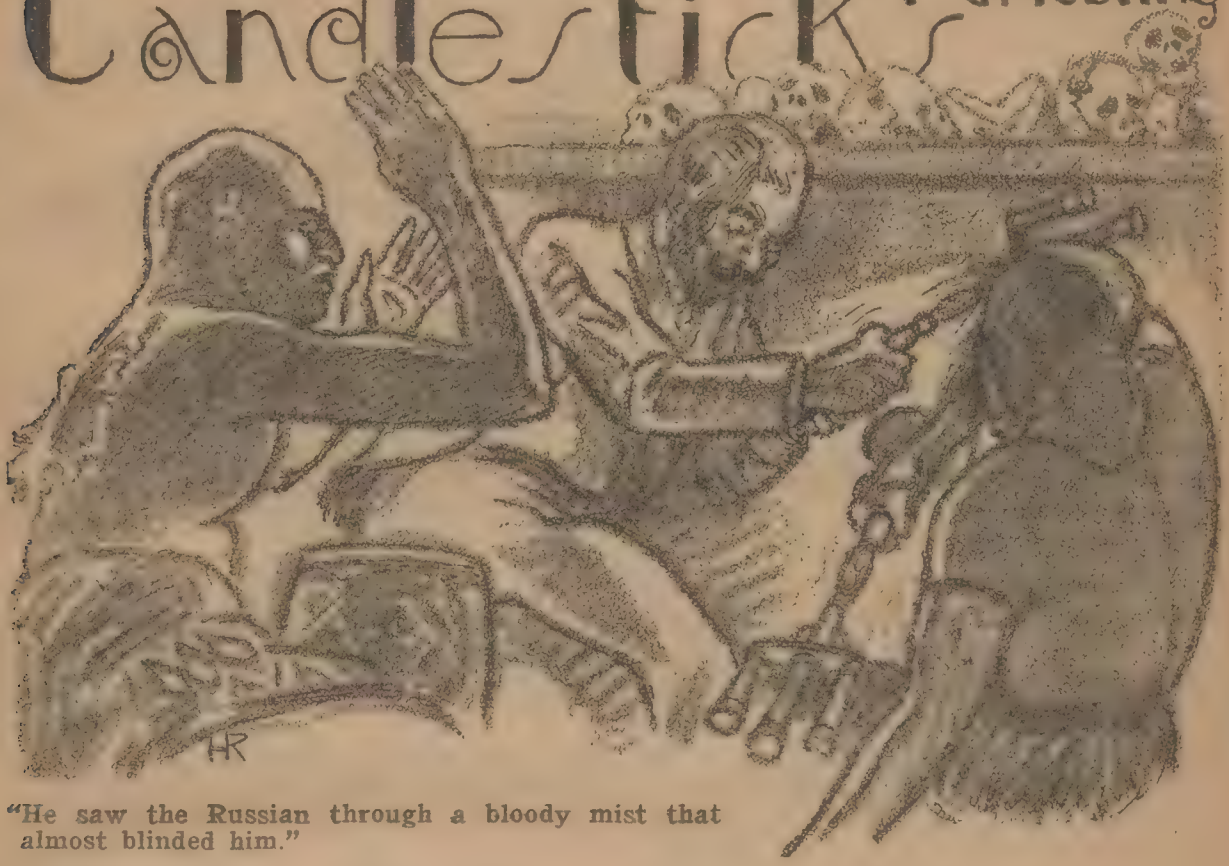
THE following is an excerpt from a letter written to Dr. Gillin, head of the British Archeological Society, and dated early in May of the year succeeding that of Dr. Fenton's diary. It is signed by Dr. Robbins, head of the party searching for Dr. Marlowe:

In regard to the diary I can say nothing—neither that I believe nor disbelieve all this preposterous writing. But there have appeared certain conflicting bits of evidence that are undoubtedly significant. The men referred to in the paragraph dated October 11 were never seen again, so far as we know. Several of our party, out on a scouting expedition, found on the banks of the Euphrates a plate of beaten gold, upon which were engraved the symbolic crescent and disk of Sin and Ai; it is clearly identical with the sacrificial vessels mentioned by Dr. Fenton.

You know that we have discovered no sign of bodies, yet we can not bring ourselves to believe the last entries in the diary. But it is remarkable to write you and tell you that yesterday evening we discovered, on the roof of the temple of Sin, Dr. Marlowe's watch! His name was engraved on the back. The watch was badly smashed, as if it had dropped a long way!

A Wager in Candlesticks

by Robert T. Griebling



"He saw the Russian through a bloody mist that almost blinded him."

DURING the generation or more in which I did business as a New Bedford ship chandler, sailors brought many a strange story of even stranger lands to me. There was that yarn of the girl on Johnnycake Hill, the story of Margaret Vandegrift and the wishing-tree, the weird stories of India and China. There was that old tale Michob Fuller brought with him from the Arctic. I have told and retold them through the years, and never have these yarns lost their relish for me.

One of the strangest of them all was the one old Joab Doane told to his guests at the wedding of Sarah Doane to Peter Bradford. Joab and I had grown up together, and through the years remained fast friends. He always remembered me with a gift of some sort or other when he came home from his whaling voyages: a scrimshawed whale's tooth, carved ivory from Korea, macabre jewelry from India or Arabia.

Joab's vessels would come back from their journeys with a fair regularity, if one can refer at all to whalers as "regular," when their voyages took anywhere from three to seven years, but there was one time when we didn't hear from him for quite a while. Yet he returned in the end, and on a ship not his own; told us he had been wrecked somewhere in the East Indies, and that's all we could learn about him.

He brought a reddish, ugly scar with him; it ran from the middle of his forehead well into the line of his hair, where it disappeared somewhere in its bushy growth. When asked about it, he told us he had been hit by a boom and refused to say more. Of course we never believed that, and we teased him about an accident such as would only happen to a landlubber. He cut us short deftly, and the scar remained a mystery until the day of Sarah's wedding. Then, in one of his rare bursts of confidence, he told us about it.

Joab gave Peter a check for $100,000 and Sarah the most perfectly matched rope of pearls it has ever been my privilege to see. She, quite naturally, asked him where he got it, and then, without any further introduction, he told us the story.

"All of you remember, I believe," he began, "most of the details of my life. You recall my early whaling days and the time when I changed to trading. I hated to give up the thrill of the whale hunt, but did it for my wife and Sarah, and took command of the *Alopex*. Jerez Mitchell was my first mate, and much of my knowledge of trading I gained from him. We tramped along the coasts of South America, around the Horn, across the Pacific, and into the East Indies. Jerez wanted to go to the Indies direct, but I followed the old whaling routes as long as I could.

"On one of our voyages we stopped at the Marquesas for water and then proceeded in the general direction of Papua. But after we passed Tahiti and the Society Islands we were driven before the wind in a terrific gale. We raced toward the south for two days and then were dashed on a reef near an island that wasn't even given on our chart. Every man jack of us was ready for disaster. Our craft had been dashed to pieces in no time, and with the help of a spar, a crate, or a piece of driftwood, we made our way to the island as best we could.

"A pleasant, cheerful sunshine spread itself over the seascape as we swam toward shore. The natives had long ago seen us and came out to help. They paddled us back in their canoes and gave us refreshments. Once on the island, we were immediately conducted to a large hut and quartered there. Fatigued beyond endurance, we threw ourselves on the rattan mats and fell into a deep sleep.

"I don't know how long I remained there, but when I awoke I found a native sitting at my side. He respectfully said to me: '*Parlez-vous français?*'

"'*Un peu,*' I answered. He then told me that 'the Master' wanted to see me, and asked me to follow him. I walked after him as he made his way through the little village, and watched the natives basking in the sun or mending their nets. Once outside the village, my guide turned sharply into a footpath that led through the jungle. We began to ascend, passed a tumbling little rill of water, veered to the left, and then began to climb in earnest. After about five minutes of this we reached a plateau.

"Along this we walked until we came to a clearing in the middle of which, much to my surprize, I saw a wide, comfortable bungalow. A veranda ran all around it, and several natives lolled in the sun before the main entrance.

"My guide turned to me and asked me whether I was fatigued from the climb. I told him I wasn't, but he insisted that I rest on the veranda until 'the Master' was ready to see me.

"I lit my pipe and looked at the landscape. Far below me I could see the shore line, to the left a bit of the village, and in the distance the wide, inscrutable sea. What

manner of man is this, I wondered, who would build on such a deserted island?

"In the midst of my ruminations my guide came out and motioned to me. I followed him through a short corridor into a room which was evidently the library. It was long, low, and dark, yet not without its comfort, and thousands of books lined the walls. A few heavy leather chairs stood about the room, in the center of which there was a beautifully carved oak table, bare except for a Persian rug, used as a runner, and a priceless majolica vase. That the owner was a man of taste and refinement was manifest. The object that arrested my attention from the beginning, however, was a fireplace set in the center of the north wall. A mantelpiece, made of a block of solid oak, ran across the top of it. On each end was set a solid silver candlestick, beautifully wrought. One of these was a trifle bent above the base, and both of them showed nicks, as though they had been battered about.

"Between these candlesticks the owner of the bungalow had arranged one of the most gruesome exhibits I had ever seen. Into my heart it struck a terror which I could not dispel, for from one candlestick to the other there was placed an array of skulls. None of them was whole. They were cracked and broken, and entire parts were missing from some of them. God, what a decoration! One of them had only half a jaw. The whole forehead of another was caved in. Three square inches at the base of another were bashed to bits; a fourth had the teeth knocked out of one side of the face; a fifth showed a ghastly cavity where the nose had been; and so on. I can not, at this late date, even begin to describe them all. I can only tell you that they brought to me an overwhelming horror. I kept my eyes on them, despite their ugliness. The center piece—the *chef d'oeuvre,* as it were, of the collection—was a sort of receptacle. Upon closer investigation I found it to be a skull sawed in half. The rim was lined with silver and it had a silver base, daintily filigreed. But before I had time to examine it more closely, my guide walked in, stepped deferentially to one side, and announced:

"'*Le Comte Fiodor Irlamanoff!*'

"I nodded slightly as an immaculately dressed gentleman stepped into the room. He returned my bow and waved me into a chair.

"'Do be seated,' he said to me in French. 'I am overjoyed to be honored with your visit.'

"What he meant by that I was to find out soon enough. Seated at the windows that gave out on the veranda I had a chance to observe my host more closely. He was dressed entirely in white, and over his heart was embroidered a coat-of-arms. His eyes were black, his face swarthy, his hair slightly grayed. He wore an imperial.

"I judged him to be a man of about forty-five or fifty. Not quite stocky in build, he was yet firmly knit, and in a hasty estimate I assumed he could give a very good account of himself in any sort of physical match. I wondered how he kept himself in such perfect condition.

"He noticed at once that I was not a Frenchman, and asked whether I could speak English. I told him I was an American and would prefer to talk in English, although I had picked up enough French in my travels to carry on a conversation. He told me that he, too, could speak the language, as he was a graduate of Oxford. He was a native of Russia, he added. Then he asked me of my voyage, the condition of my finances, the health of my crew, and other matters that occupied my immediate concern. I told him of

our adventures since we had left New Bedford, and since he had never seen a whaling-ship, I offered to take him aboard the next one that came past the island.

"He smiled wistfully at this and said, 'Ah, sir, they do not often come this way.'

"He then gave instructions to have my crew properly taken care of and begged me to stay with him at the bungalow, and he assured me he would entertain me as best he could. I shuddered at the thought of having to stay in the same place that harbored the skulls, but I could not very well refuse. I saw to it that my crew were at ease, told them where I would be in case they wanted me, and went back to the bungalow.

"If there is anything I have to thank Irlamanoff for, I want to thank him for it now, for the days of my stay, with the exception of one somber and sinister influence, were as happy as they could be under the circumstances.

"The Russian was a fascinating conversationist, and he made me laugh time and time again over his pranks at Oxford and over some of the amusing anecdotes of the Russian court. He would tell them at random, upon almost any occasion, while we were hunting, fishing, or swimming in the lovely waters of the bay, where the natives had erected a long breakwater to keep out the sharks. At night, when it often grew quite cool, one of the brown-skinned attendants lit a fire, and then Irlamanoff and I would sit and read, sipping an occasional whisky-and-soda—a remnant of his Oxford days—and later retire after an exhilarating evening among the classics. There was nothing else to do, for the Russian informed me that ships passed by only at great intervals, and that often they would not even stop, for they could not see the tiny smudge which the natives fired whenever they spied a sail.

"But constantly there hovered this sinister influence over these serene days. Something, I sensed, was not quite right with this carefree existence. The skulls, I was sure, had something to do with it. Time and again I would glance at them anxiously, wondering whether the count would ever tell me about them. I dared not ask.

"He saw my eyes wander in the direction of the fireplace one time, and said leisurely, 'You want to know about them? Never mind, I shall tell you—some day.'

"That day—alas!—came all too soon for me.

"SEVERAL weeks later, after the count had delivered a most charming account of one of his many gay episodes, I asked him to tell me why he chose this place to live in, when he surely could have the pick of any city on the continent.

"'There is an interesting bit of history connected with my move here,' he volunteered. 'My father had intended that I, as the eldest son, should take over the management of our estates in Russia after my return from Oxford. I loathed the country, and dallied at the imperial court as long as I could while on my way back from London. But I had an unfortunate affair with a woman of the court. Have patience; it's not quite the same sort of an affair you might expect to find in some other man. The woman was the wife of a high official, and one night—she took a fancy to me—while we were at a riotous party, she blabbed out a state secret in an intoxicated moment. Innocently enough I repeated it to my father when I arrived on the estate. He was furious and swore that he would have me out of the country; for any careless repetition of what I had

heard—a drunken confidence—might plunge the whole world into war.

"'He communicated with the proper authorities and they arranged to have me cast into exile. The woman and her husband retired precipitantly from court life, and are now, to the best of my knowledge, living in Canada. It was a sore blow to the official—but think of what it meant to me! I had my life before me and was filled to the brim with a *joie de vivre* impossible to suppress. I was so distressed at the idea of leaving Europe that I begged my father to reconsider his resolution. He was too loyal a Czarist to renege, and his Tarquinian severity was well known to me. I knew I was lost. So I asked him if I could tour the world in order to find the place most suitable for me. I found this island and determined to stay. My father arranged all details of settlement.

"'Life began to dull fearfully for me. You can understand what a terrible banishment this must be for a man like me, who at the beginning of a brilliant career in the courts of Europe had to give up everything and live among these native swine. But I realized too well that my presence in Russia might be disastrous. My secret was too important. . . . And so you see me here, a hostage for the peace of the world, merely because I had been made a partner in a confidence for which I did not at all care.

"'But oh for a taste, just a taste of my former life! For glorious adventure, for stirring combat, for just one hour of exhilaration among the people of my kind! Believe me, sir, I longed for it as no man in a dungeon ever longed for liberty. How I recall those rollicking nights, the wines, the company of those precious officers, the intoxicating music of a Viennese waltz, the company of women! It's—it's been a long time ago, but I thirst for this excitement now as I have never thirsted for it before!'

"His voice trailed off into silence. I saw him tremble slightly, as though he were cold. I pitied him. Turning his eyes toward me, he continued:

"'Sir, I am a brave man, and in my fight with this solitude I decided on the brave thing. I determined to pit myself against my fortune. I craved adventure, and for this adventure I was quite willing to give my all—even my life. I created problems, and no matter what their solution, I knew I would win out either way. I have outwitted my fate so far, but there may always come a day when I shall succumb. Do I sound obscure? I will explain.

"'Here is my plan: I decided that whoever came to this island should have a chance to "better his fortune," as they say in French.

"'I planned to give him that chance. There is, of course, some risk connected with the undertaking, but no man can hope to better his chances if he isn't willing to take some risk.

"'I planned to duel with my guests. Not with swords or pistols—I know too much about these weapons, and my adversaries would not have an even chance. So I decided on these candlesticks which you see on the mantelpiece. "Winner take all" was my slogan. Whoever would be the better man would become lord over this domain and be wealthy in his own right. My moneys are great. I would prepare a will, lay it on the mantelpiece, and enter my contestant's name on the blank space. The signatures would be witnessed by two of my natives and the battle would begin. If I won, I would have my adventure and my thrill—God knows they come seldom enough for me—and if the other man would win out, he would take over this estate and the gilt-edged consols I have in the British banks.

"'The plan has worked beautifully for me thus far, and that these others'—he waved a hand at the skulls—'were not able to get their reward has been no fault of mine!'

"His features had changed, and from the suave, cultured gentleman I had seen before me all this time he assumed the guise of a killer. He laughed a cruel laugh and picked up one of the skulls.

"'This one gave me quite a battle,' he said. 'Look at the heavy brows. He was a man of immense height and strength and he almost did for me. But a lucky turn of the wrist and an error on his part, and he lost.'

"I looked at the skull in horror. Despite its thickness it had been bashed in just over the right eye. It was hideous, and before my eyes there arose the vision of that fighting pair, the blood, and the broken, crushed face of the man who succumbed.

"'Come now,' said the count; 'what do you think of it?'

"'I think it's inconceivable,' I answered. 'How can you deliberately plot the life of a man in this way?'

"'Tush,' he answered. 'Remember, we live in an uncivilized country, and this is not looked upon as too gross. Understand me, I do not make this wager with everyone. I only take those whom I consider as good physically as myself, or better. I take the same chances they do. They have the opportunity to become wealthy at one stroke'—he made a quick downward motion with his arm, much as a hatchet-man swings his bolo, and laughed melodramatically—'while I have nothing to gain by combat except the brief thrill. You have had ample opportunity, by this time, to know that the dull hours here are by far the most prevalent.'

"He gave me a long glance that took me in from head to foot, measured me slowly with his eyes, and continued:

"'From the day you landed here you have interested me immensely. I have come to believe, in the days that you have been with me, that you are of my mettle, and so I have chosen you for my next combat. Do you accept the challenge?'

"Suavely, smoothly, graciously he said this, as though he were offering me the chance of an audience at the Kremlin, yet his eyes glistened eagerly as he waited for my reply.

"'I certainly do not,' I said, 'and the sooner you put this out of your head the better it will be for the health of your visitors and for your own mind's contentment.'

"'My mind is content enough,' he replied, and then: 'Ha, a fine one you are to make suggestions! Remember, I am master here, and my word is law. If you do not accept I shall have you shot like a dog before you ever reach the shore. You shall never leave alive, I assure you!'

"The man was mad; loneliness had made him so. And despite his madness I could not help admiring him. He at least was sport enough to risk his life to satisfy his whim. I had to decide quickly. There was no way out. My tongue clove to my palate as I said:

"'Very well; I accept!'

"Irlamanoff gloated; he told me not to be uneasy.

"'We'll draw up the will the next time a ship comes in, and meanwhile—shall we go hunting tomorrow?'

"My look of horror at this casual suggestion must have left an impression, for he continued:

"'Do you find this so extraordinary, my friend? Just because we shall be enemies sometime in the future, that is no reason why we can't be friends now. I intend to be a good host to you, and I have planned your stay here. No treach-

ery with the guns, now—understand? I have too much to lose.'

"I gave him a level glance and said: 'You have my word; I have never broken that and I do not intend to break it now.'

"THE next few weeks would have been among the happiest in my life had not the shadow of our impending duel hung over me. I half wished the time would come, for I had become almost crazed from going through that house with that crazy man, looking apprehensively at the skulls, and seeing visions of my own skull adorning some part of the house. Where would Irlamanoff place it? I often wondered. The mantelpiece was already filled to capacity. Perhaps he would toss it away. At least that would be a better fate than to have it in the room there, where he could point it out and display the gashes, the broken teeth, the shattered jaw-bone or whatever injury the skull would receive in the combat.

"About two months later we saw a sail on the horizon. The natives built a smudge fire to attract attention to the island. A fierce eagerness swept over the count. I had never seen him so jubilant before. His eyes glistened, he rolled them up and around, raised his eyebrows and scanned the waters to see whether the captain of the vessel had seen our signal. The ship changed its course and came toward us.

"Irlamanoff became obsessed with joy. He danced a bit on the green before the bungalow, threw a kiss at the approaching vessel, and cried:

"'Ah, my friend, at last—the great adventure! We go it tomorrow! Let us enter and draw the will.'

"I followed him sullenly. He asked me to sit in the library while he brought the necessary papers. I slumped into a chair and stared at the skulls. By tomorrow night there would either be another skull stuck somewhere about the room, or——

"I did not have time to finish the thought. Irlamanoff returned and drew his chair close to mine. 'So, now we can work,' he said.

"The will was not a lengthy document. It was written in French and its contents were clear: the bungalow to the native chief, the silver to his followers, the trinkets to the Irlamanoffs in Russia. The count's jewels and British bonds were to go to his conqueror.

"Vaguely I answered the questions he put to me regarding the details; I told him again and again that I did not want this fight, that the whole thing was repulsive to me, that I would box him or wrestle him or do anything else to give him that thrill. He looked at me and made a grimace and said:

"'Do you think that such a mild form of sport as a boxing-match would satisfy my craving for the eccentric? Man, you must be crazy! I have spilled blood before—I want to spill it again! I know what I want, so please don't try to suggest such foolishness to me. Remember, I am willing to risk my life for this sport, and the winner will be rewarded handsomely. If I win, I lose, for I do not desire to live here longer; if I die, I win, because death will be a release. If my opponent wins, he becomes wealthy beyond his most extravagant dreams. If he loses, he gets nothing but what he would have received anyway had he not reached this island. Now then, when do you want the combat? The ship's crew will not be here before tomorrow, and I shan't let them come up here until we have settled our score. My natives will entertain them in the meanwhile. What do you say—tomorrow at 6?'

"'As you wish,' I answered.

"'Good,' he replied. 'I shall have one of the men wake you. Now for a little *souper*, eh?'

"He told his natives to bring the meal into the library. I ate sparingly, envying the man who could make such a hearty meal of it with possible death facing him. He also drank heavily. We talked long into the evening, but at last I excused myself and said I wanted to go to sleep. He was quite drunk by this time. He lurched from his chair, clutched me by the shoulder, and exclaimed:

" 'One minute, one minute! You must have a nightcap before you retire—a nightcap such as you have never had in your life!'

"He reached for a bottle, staggered to the mantelpiece, lifted the receptacle from its center, poured the contents of the bottle into it, held it toward me and said:

" 'Drink to your success of tomorrow! Drink it out of the skull of a late adversary of mine! Drink, drink!'

"He tendered the vessel to me mockingly. In anger I dashed it out of his hand. The wine spilled on the floor, the cup rolled to the other end of the room. The sound it made as it bounded over the hardwood was much like a death rattle. I shuddered.

"My host calmly filled two glasses, handed one of them to me, and said, 'Ah, well, my friend, tonight we part—companions; tomorrow we meet as—enemies. Tonight—ah, tonight I am just a little drunk, but tomorrow you shall see me active. I shall be at my post, and, fool,' with a warning good-night, 'see that you be at yours!'

"I took the glass, looked at him with level eyes, and toasted: 'To the best man, then; be on your guard, Irlamanoff!'

"The count lurched from the room, repeating over and over again: 'Never mind; I shall, I shall!'

"And his demoniac laughter echoed through the halls.

"I followed slowly, disgusted with the whole business and in particular with the beast who was my host. Though I tossed about on my bed for more than an hour, I yet fell into a sound sleep at the end. I did not waken until a native tugged at my pajama sleeve.

" 'Come,' he said softly, 'the Master is ready.' With a groan I rose to my feet and ran my fingers through my hair. In imagination I already touched the skull that, in a short time, would adorn this monster's chambers, bashed and broken.

"By God, the thing was unjust! The man was crazy, I knew, yet I felt that in order to protect myself I would have to kill him. Would I? Perhaps there was some way out. God knows I didn't want this quarrel.

"The native must have guessed my thoughts, for he smiled and pointed out of the window. Only too clearly I saw, ambushed in the reeds at the end of the clearing, another native with a bandolier of cartridges slung around his naked body and a Springfield rifle across his knees.

" 'We would follow the Master like sheep,' my native said. 'It is no use. But if you should win, *Tuan*——'

"He did not finish the sentence. We heard the moving of furniture in the library. I walked out of the room.

"I was the first of the combatants to enter the long, low room. I noticed that the table had been cleared away, as had the rest of the furniture. Even the rugs had been carried out. The floor was slippery, and here and there one could see dark stains—like a dance floor, I thought, where a dance of death was about to be begun. But the stains attracted my attention.

"The native saw me, sidled up to me, and whispered: 'They were made by your predecessors. We could never quite rub out the blots.'

"In disgust I turned away and walked to the window. In the harbor I could see the ship; it was an American whaler. Natives in their canoes were going out toward it, greeting the sailors cheerfully, waving brightly colored scarfs and sashes. They were to know nothing, possibly, of this combat, I thought sadly. Perhaps there would be someone else on board that ship who would be a prey to the blood-lust of the count.

"A door opened.

"'Ah, there you are,' a voice called out.

"It was my antagonist. I turned to meet him face to face. He was again dressed in white. His imperial and his mustaches were waxed like those of a dandy. He looked the picture of health, and yet—I thought I detected deep lines under his eyes. I wondered whether the wine of the night before had had its effect.

"'*Voilà*, my friend,' he said; "now for the final preparations.'

"He clapped his hands. A servant brought something in a box. The count commanded me to take off my shoes and socks. I did so, and a native came over and rubbed the soles of my feet with rosin. He later did the same with Irlamanoff.

"While this was going on, the far alcove of the room had slowly filled itself with several natives. One of them carried a crude drum, another a shepherd's pipe, a third a pair of cymbals. The last man bore a large wooden box made of a resonant wood; in one hand he carried two clappers. Irlamanoff viewed them with evident satisfaction.

"'You will watch the encounter,' he told the leader in French, 'and you will play accordingly.'

"I stared at the count in astonishment. Blood-music? That's what it evidently was to be, for Irlamanoff never gave them another thought. He turned to me and asked:

"'Are we ready?'

"I nodded.

"I noticed that his voice had lost the smoothness which it carried when he formerly addressed himself to me. Now he was all steel; the syllables came from his throat with the rattling quickness of the bullets of an automatic rifle. Quickly he strode to the mantelpiece, picked up both candlesticks, and came toward me. I took one of them, he the other; then we both went to opposite corners of the room. Only the orchestra remained; all the other servants had left.

"'Now,' he said.

"Slowly the drum began to beat with a weird, stifling cadence as we advanced toward each other. This sound never varied throughout the encounter. The man with the pipe followed the count's movements, raising the pitch of his instrument higher and higher as the count neared. Every move I made was mocked and caricatured by the man with the hollow box. The cymbals had as yet not sounded.

"Irlamanoff walked slowly toward me, twirling his weapon as though it might have been a tennis racket, catching it and then again spinning it. To the strident tones of the pipe, we came within six feet of each other near the center of the room, and then began to pirouette—that is the only word I can use to describe our wary motions. The drum beat on and on: . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug . . . thug. . . .

"ROUND and round we turned, eyes upon eyes, our hands slowly turning the candlesticks. Suddenly he lunged and struck. The pipe gave a high, shrill note and then stopped. I ducked, caught his wrist on my elbow, and the candlestick descended on the thick of my shoulder. The man with the box aped the movements: clack, clack, clack,

clack-clack, clack, clack-clack, clack, clack, clack.

"Outside of a bruise I was not damaged. I began to watch my antagonist more warily. We circled round and round, always looking for an opening, yet seemingly getting nowhere. Perspiration began to ooze out of our brows; we were exceedingly tense. The tom, tom, tom of the drum through it all irritated me; it gave me a headache and dried my throat. With one hand I motioned the man to stop, but he disregarded me. The count began to laugh.

"Even as he laughed he struck, but this time I eluded him by dashing backward several feet. He was tricked by my feint; his piece described a wide circle, and he nearly fell down. But in an instant he was on his feet again, circled, and fastened those dark eyes intensely upon me. The pipe, which had been playing a high, crying tone all this time, lowered its pitch and began to play a few lugubrious notes. He circled; I followed warily. My back was turned toward the window and his face came full into the light. I could see that his eyes were bloodshot, and this fact filled me with a calm to which I undoubtedly owe my life. 'This man may be quick,' I thought, 'but he is no match for me.' He was still feeling the effects of the wine and I determined to give him enough time to play himself out and then force his surrender.

"So I kept on the defensive, watching him intently. My arm began to feel a trifle numb where he had hit me. For the third time he struck, and this time we clashed. With a shriek the cymbals dashed together as our weapons met, the drum boomed, the hollow box crackled, and the pipe shrilled its way into the highest register and stayed there. The candlesticks crashed time and time again, yet neither of us could get a direct hit. It was excellent parrying. Once I came close enough to him to strip a piece of skin from his jaw—and I thought the pipe would shiver to bits in its agony—but outside of that he was unscathed. Still we clinched instead of breaking away. We clubbed at each other's ribs or held each other's fighting arms at bay. The man at the box beat a savage rat-tat-tat on his instrument as the candlesticks thudded on our sides. I dared not let go until I knew that I could retreat to the safety of distance. Irlamanoff knew that too, and held to me as long as he could.

"But finally I broke and got away safely. The racket in the corner died down to a sob; only the drum kept up its steady beating. Thus we encountered and broke time and time again, leaving the fray with bruised muscles or cracked ribs. But suddenly he determined to make his great attack, for he lunged. This time I did not elude him. Though I caught his upraised hand with my left, I had not the power to stay the blow. The candlestick struck me over the eye—just where you see this scar. Simultaneously the cymbals clashed. I was blinded by blood and stunned by the shock. I lost my head and lashed about freely with my leaping candlestick. The music, if I can call it that, struck up again, weird and sensuous, lascivious and sadistic in its interpretation. Irlamanoff gave several short grunts that told me my blows had found their target. I went to close in on him, but before I could get a firm grip he writhed like a cat and wrenched himself loose.

"We were both beside ourselves by this time. The music lashed us on to a bestial fury. I was ready to kill; he had been ready for a long time. But he stayed away from my right arm and again circled. By and by my head became clearer, though I felt weak from loss of blood. I could hardly use my left arm defensively

because I constantly had to brush the blood out of my eyes.

"Irlamanoff determined upon a last attack. Catlike he came nearer and nearer. At first I did not notice him, but the pipe, which he had in the room in order to blare his triumph, this time served to warn me of his attack. Subconsciously, through the struggle, I had noted the soaring notes as we came close to each other, and the low, macabre tones when we were distant. Now the pipe played high and shrill. As I looked he leaped. I saw, through the bloody mist that almost incapacitated me, the glint of the stick in the sun.

"I brought my own stick against this bit of sunny brightness—all that I could see in my dazed condition; heard the clash of metal upon metal; saw his piece go spinning against a wall and then drop to the floor.

"The count was holding his hand. I noticed that his right arm was fearfully bent, and knew that I had broken it.

" 'Ahhhh,' he said several times, 'ahhhh, what have you done?' And then: 'Oh, my God!'

"With a wrench and a groan he flung out his arms and waited for me. His face was livid, sweat rolled from his brow, and his arm had already begun to assume an ugly color.

" 'Come,' he said finally. 'Why do you not come?' I stood stockstill, the candlestick in one hand. I was so glad the struggle was over that I could find no words. Again he pleaded:

" 'You have won; finish me.' He said it listlessly, yet it was more than a request; it was a sob, a prayer, a plea for release from his unhappy existence. He wanted to be rid of it, yet wanted that one great adventure in his life to come at this moment—and I could not give it to him.

"I threw aside my piece, walked up to him, and said, 'We've had enough of this nonsense. Let's clean up.'

"He tottered toward me, a look of unbelief on his face. 'What,' he queried, 'you're not going to bean me?' I almost smiled at this quaint Oxford remnant.

" 'No, of course not.'

"He looked at me, saw that I meant it, and sank to the floor in a huddled heap. The orchestra, which had been quiet for the last few minutes, filed slowly out of the room. Irlamanoff began to sob.

"I made a move toward the door, but he beckoned for me to sit down. I went to the window and there saw the sailors in the main street far below and thanked God that I would soon be with them. All the while I looked, the man beside me sobbed, quietly, brokenly. His wrist was now quite swollen, as was the arm above it. This must have given him considerable pain.

"At last he spoke: 'You have won the wager. All I have is yours.'

" 'Thanks,' I said tartly, 'I don't want any of your goods. All I want is a promise from you.'

" 'A promise?'

" 'Yes; I want you to promise me that never again will you put another living soul in needless jeopardy.'

" 'That's easy,' he said with a forlorn laugh; 'now that I have nothing I will not be able to make this sort of wager.'

" 'The place is still yours, so are the jewels and the consols; I don't want them,' I said. 'But I do want that promise.'

"He gave it, and I suggested that we have breakfast after we cleaned our wounds. I helped him up, and as I did so, my eye fell on the skulls.

" 'One thing more,' I said as we were leaving the room. He followed my gaze and understood even before I made the suggestion. 'I want you to destroy those skulls; they'll leave a bad impression on you!'

"'I never want to see them again after this,' he said, and called a servant, who quietly removed them. The mantelpiece looked curiously blank.

The natives helped us to wash, dressed our wounds, bandaged them, and then served breakfast to us on the veranda. The sight of that ship, which was so soon to take me back to New Bedford, almost made me cry. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare.

"I ATE a hearty breakfast, though the count ate hardly anything. Following the meal we had a drink together, and then I rose.

"'I shall return with this ship, as you know,' I said. I gripped his left hand—for his right was in bandages—and continued, 'And I know you will not break your promise to me.'

"He gave his word and then added, 'But you must take something from me.'

"'I shall be glad to take only my liberty,' I replied, and strode off the veranda toward the path that would lead me to the shore.

"I reached my crew and shook hands happily with the sailors from the other ship. It proved to be the bark *Morning Star*, just up from a whaling voyage, and its hold was loaded to the gunwales with the precious oil. The long-boat had already left with one load of men and was now coming back for the second. Of course my men would not leave until I had been taken along. I was plied with questions concerning my mishap, but I refused to talk about it.

"Just before the long-boat put out for the ship we heard a shrill cry from the top of the hill, and a moment later saw a figure in white run down the path. In a trice Irlamanoff—for it was he—came to the clearing at the beach and ran toward us. I had to marvel at his strength, for I knew the pain he was in, knew exactly where I had struck him half an hour before, and knew that I felt so stiff from the encounter that I could move only laboredly.

"'Please accept this as a keepsake,' he muttered, and thrust a flat box into my hand. Then he waved good-bye and walked slowly toward the village.

"On board ship, when I was finally left alone in my cabin, I had occasion to look into the box. There they were, this very rope of pearls which I gave my Sarah for her wedding. When I returned to America I placed them in a safe deposit vault in Boston, and I have kept them there ever since."

"And that's where they're going right after this wedding," Sarah had exclaimed.

"Why?" her father asked.

"Because pearls mean tears, and I shall be reminded of your ghastly story every time I wear them and shall probably cry about it whenever I think of it."

"I'm sorry, then, that I told you about them." her father said.

THREE COFFINS

by ARTHUR J. BURKS

"The feeling of dread came back to him."

"YOU had better take them," said Lieutenant Wilson, for the tenth time within the space of an hour.

I was standing moodily at the door of the *iduana* as he spoke, looking out at Barahona's mahogany wharf where our little sloop, the *Manelik*, rode jauntily at her moorings. I whirled toward him. Why, in God's name, should he insist upon pressing these gruesome things upon me when my heart was already heavy with a nameless foreboding which, for the life of me, I could not dispel?

"Blast it, Wilson," I almost shouted, "can't you realize what effect those three coffins would have upon my blacks? It will take us two days to raise Beatta Island, and there is no place on the boat where we could carry those coffins except right on deck—where the negroes could see them during every waking hour aboard. They speak English, those men, because I got them from the English-speaking settlement near Samana; but there their resemblance to the white man ends. They are still as superstitious as were their forefathers of the Congo."

"But, Carver," insisted Wilson, "stop to think a moment, man! There will be three white people, besides yourself, with your outfit. These three must remain on Beatta Island

for an indefinite period, while you will be at liberty to come and go. What if one of them dies? If a negro goes he may be buried on the island. If one of your subordinates happened to die you would wish his body returned to the States. It would require at least three days, traveling with your best speed, for you to reach Barahona in case of the death of a white man. Another day before a ship could reach Beatta from the capital, carrying a suitable coffin; one day for the return to the capital: five days in all, during which the dead would remain unburied. This is the tropics, Carver—and the dead do not keep."

"All right, Wilson," I said in desperation; "break out your caskets. We'll take them with us."

I knew as soon as I had made the decision that it had been unwise. I tried to argue with myself that Wilson spoke truly; for the government coffins were air-tight, and in them the dead could be buried and preserved for the arrival of a boat.

I shook my head impatiently, stepped to the door of the *iduana*, in which Lieutenant Wilson of the *Policia Nacional* had his headquarters, and beckoned to one of my blacks lounging on the wharf near the *Manelik*. He came toward me in a shambling sort of trot.

"Hurry to the Hotel Central," I told him, "and tell Williams, Gordon and Oliver to report to me at once. As soon as you have told them, come back to the *Manelik* and break out the rest of the men for a working party. Lively now, for we sail as soon as possible."

Once more he moved at that shambling trot of his, and in twenty minutes the three white men stood before me. I saw at once that all three had been looking upon the wine while it was red, and white, but their inebriation had not gone beyond the stage of boisterous hilarity. They greeted me loudly and slapped one another upon the backs with hearty good fellowship.

I turned back to Lieutenant Wilson. As I did so the blacks from the sloop gathered at the foot of the wooden steps leading to the door of the *iduana*.

"All right, Wilson," I said; "where are they?"

"Right under this building," he replied.

"Can you turn them over to me without a lot of government red tape?"

"Sure. They've been here for God knows how long. From all I can learn, the government has lost them from the property return."

"Are they in good condition?"

"Yep. Were the last time I examined them."

The lieutenant leading the way, we quitted the *iduana* and stopped before a padlocked door beside the flight of wooden steps and below the level of the *iduana* floor.

I turned to the three whites who were to aid me in erecting a stone building on Beatta Island—a building which the government had ordered and for which all specifications had been drawn up: an island prison.

"Here, you men," I said; "get these things aboard at once. We sail immediately."

The lieutenant had unlocked the door and, stooping, had entered the cryptlike room under the *iduana*. Williams, Gordon and Oliver, still laughing and kidding one another, followed him. They shouted to the blacks, who willingly placed muscular hands upon the three long wooden boxes which, because of the darkness, they could not see.

The great boxes, with their outer casings of unlovely wood, were dragged forth and lowered to the ground.

It was Williams the irrepressible who first realized what they were.

"Hey, you Gordon and Oliver," he shouted, "look what the boss is carting along! Three wooden overcoats—one for each of us!"

An eery chill crept through me at the words, which had in them a vague sort of prophecy.

The superstitious blacks were quick to note this, too. They drew back hurriedly, as though the coffins had been hot to their hands, and, drawing off, began to whisper excitedly among themselves in Spanish—a language which they spoke as well as English.

I could have struck Williams for his thoughtless remark. Confound it, he knew quite well what a time I had persuading those blacks to go to Beatta in the first place! Beatta, that dreary, God-forgotten blob of land south of the peninsula where that brutal Dominican dictator, Lili, had banished so many people of both sexes to die; that island which the natives say is inhabited by the spirits of the restless dead, and upon which no Dominican will set foot after nightfall.

By dint of much profanity and coaxing, I finally persuaded the negroes to continue the work of removing the coffins to the *Manelik*.

And a dreary cortege it was. The coffins were very heavy and the men were compelled to walk slowly. It was almost as though it were a funeral procession, moving softly out across the wharf as though intent upon consigning to Neiba Bay the bodies of three who had passed.

Williams had imbibed just enough to deaden his native shrewdness, and had not noted the havoc his thoughtless remark had caused.

Now he went a step further. He had seized upon an end of one of the coffins to encourage the blacks, and while he was in that position another nonsensical idea came to his mind.

With a mock show of reverence he removed his hat and placed it atop the coffin!

The negroes should have laughed at this, but they didn't. All down that line of slowly moving men the blacks in turn removed their shabby headpieces and placed them in twin rows upon the coffins which they carried! What with that sense of nameless foreboding which already weighed me down, this concerted action did not tend to lift my gloomy spirits, you may be quite sure of that.

We placed the three coffins on the deck of the *Manelik* and covered them with a tarpaulin.

And the blacks forgot them for the moment in the hurry and bustle preparatory to casting off.

We had the usual trouble of the sailing-boat in clearing Punta Martin Garcia. For it juts out into Neiba Bay and shuts off the breeze which is needed to fill the sails. We tacked back and forth monotonously for three hours before we cleared the bleak headland. The sun had gone down and the lights in Barahona were twinkling like fireflies before we finally nosed into the breeze and the Dominican skipper gave the word to put the tiller over for the long run down the coast.

The boom crashed athwartship swiftly as she came about, while the curbed bit of metal securing its end to the gooseneck rasped harshly and gratingly in protest.

One of the blacks had been standing in the path of the boom, staring moodily back at the lights in Barahona. No one had noticed him in time to shout a warning. The heavy stick struck him at the base of the skull, lifting him clear of the deck and hurling him over the side.

"Man overboard!"

We circled the spot three times before the Dominican skipper announced himself as satisfied to proceed without the unlucky black. For my part I knew that the blow from the boom had killed the negro and that, even as we searched about the spot where we had last seen him, the sharks were probably feasting upon his flesh—or circling about his sinking body until satisfied that he did not live.

The breeze had freshened noticeably as we swung back upon our course, and just as the skipper gave the word to hold her steady—he having picked out his course by observing the Barahona lights and those which he knew to be below Juan Estaban on Point Averna—a fierce, moaning gust of wind swooped down from the clouds which were gathering swiftly above our heads, and snatched away the tarpaulin that covered those three coffins.

Writhing, twisting, whipping this way and that as though in agony, the tarpaulin flew away on the wings of the wind—away to port and the open Caribbean.

As I watched it disappear in the darkness, a weird flapping shadow against the distant horizon, it made me think shudderingly of a shroud that has been torn sacrilegiously aside by a vandal's hand.

The blacks were grouped now in a reclining mass on the deck, well away from the coffins, but they started nervously as the tarpaulin flapped eerily over the side. Some of them rose to their knees and followed with their eyes the flight of the blanket of canvas; others looked in every direction except toward the canvas and that trio of coffins.

Their superstitious minds were seizing upon every little happening, augmenting its potentialities until already, in the first few hours of our journey, I realized that almost anything might cause them to overpower the three other whites and myself and put back to Barahona. I could tell by reading their smoldering eyes that they felt themselves embarked upon a voyage of ill omen.

I was going to Beatta. I knew in my heart that all my fantastic ideas of the afternoon had been born of sleepless nights in the tropics, and that, once we were upon the island, everything would run smoothly. The successful erecting of that building for the government meant that I could return home—*home*, do you hear me?—for the first time in three long years, and with money in my pockets. It would take much to compel me to abandon the project—even though I knew that the only reason the contract had been offered an American was that no Dominican would accept it. The best educated of them are abject with fear when there is even a whisper of ghosts.

And Beatta is believed to be filled with them, while even on the mainland, three miles away, the natives claim that they can hear their wailing when the wind is right—banshee screams which float across the strait between, causing pickaninnies to whimper against their parents' sides in the darkness of huts which are barred and double-barred against the evils of night-time.

I was pondering upon these wails, which even white people of my acquaintance had claimed to have heard from the mainland, and trying to persuade myself that they were but the moaning of the waves which dash skyward along the coastal cliffs of Beatta, where the rocks are honeycombed with holes and dusky caverns built by the sea.

Is it any wonder then, that, pondering on these eery wails, my flesh went cold where I sat in the sternsheets, as a terrible wail suddenly rent the air aboard the *Manelik* itself? Ripping the murky silence, cutting through the roaring of the waves which crashed against our starboard quarter, mounting skyward swiftly as though an unseen ghostly body fled up the shrouds, the chilling wail brought every soul aboard the *Manelik* up standing.

The negroes were on their feet, scared eyes turned toward those coffins on the deck, giving back slowly toward me as though seeking protection of a white man, while up from the blackness of the hold came the three white faces of Williams, Gordon and Oliver, which trio had gone below to

sleep off the effects of Barahona's hospitality.

I pushed my way through the cordon of negroes, pausing where I could see those three coffins, side by side upon the deck. Not a soul was up forward there, not a thing that moved near those coffins. Yet the wail had issued, apparently, from one of those gruesome wooden boxes. Then I caught a glimpse of something that moved near the middle coffin.

My three white subordinates were beside me now. I looked into their faces to see what they made of it and saw that they were white and drawn, the eyes starting oddly from their sockets. Cold sober now, the three white men were shaking as though they had the ague.

The veneer of civilization had dropped from them and they were in the grip of a superstitious fear rivaling that which numbed the tongues of the usually garrulous negroes.

I whirled as a shaky laugh came from just behind me. It was the Dominican skipper, and he, too, was afraid—filled with doubt, as I could tell by his senseless laughter. But he thought he knew whence came that wailing sound—thought he knew but was not sure. He feared to investigate and find himself wrong.

"It ees my little *perro*—my what-you-call-heem-in-English? — my little dog!"

Broken English. But it filled me with hope. Hope that my blacks would not be stampeded. I knew that I was the one to whom they all, even the three whites, looked for guidance. With an oath I walked steadily forward to where the three coffins lay bare on the deck beyond the step of the mast—and found a scrawny Dominican mongrel crouched in the shelter of the middle coffin!

He lifted his nose to repeat the long-drawn wail just as I bent to grasp his muzzle; but my hand about his nose choked off the sound.

The tension relaxed aboard the *Manelik*. The negroes sprawled again upon the deck—well away from those three coffins. The three whites returned to the warmth and darkness of the hold. I took the tiller from the trembling hand of one of the crew, bidding him get what sleep he might upon the deck.

The hours wore on and darkness settled heavily upon the face of the Carribean Sea. With my hand on the helm I gave a point and took one, methodically, my mind busy with fantasies. I thought that the negroes slept.

But to my straining ears—straining to catch vagrant sounds that I really did not wish to hear—came the low whispers of two of the blacks. Whispers in the English of Samana.

"What for did that mutt howl, huh? They only howls like that when death is nigh!"

I strained my ears to catch more of the whispers, but I caught no other intelligible words, and heard nothing but the moaning of the waves which broke against our starboard quarter, the soughing of the wind in the sails—and the creaking of the three coffins as they rubbed gently together with the rolling of the *Manelik*.

2

The blacks slept at last—or I thought that they did. The waves continued to break against our starboard quarter. The wind played an eery tune in the sail and rigging. The *Manelik*, stout victory of the native shipbuilder's art, rode the seas bravely, rocking gracefully from side to side. There was the grating sound as the mooring lines gave and grew taut with the playing of the boom, the bubbling of the water beneath the keel, the foaming where the cutwater slashed through the waves—and the persistent grating of the coffins as they rubbed together with the rolling of the *Manelik*.

I alone, of those aboard the boat, watched and listened. I was surprized that the superstitious negroes had been able to woo Morpheus so successfully. Their limp bodies gave and lurched with the movement of the boat—gave and lurched even as did the silent coffins forward of the mast.

I likened myself whimsically to the Ancient Mariner among his dead, and to pass the hours more rapidly I tried to recall verses of the poem. I could not do so, but the thought of them caused weird fancies to scurry through my imaginative mind.

I was a spirit at the helm of a ghost ship, piloting my silent bark, loaded to the gunwales with useless human clay, through a gloomy ocean, uncharted hitherto by living men. The mongrel dog of the Dominican skipper came up from the hold to sniff and smell at the bare feet of the negroes; he became, to my fancy, a fetid-mouthed hyena searching for carrion, a weird moving shape in the waist of the little vessel. A negro shifted suddenly, groaned in his sleep—and the dog jumped back affrighted, as though the dead, unexpectedly, had moved. The animal moved away then, out of my sight.

But it was far worse when the rain began to fall and the negroes, plunging pell-mell into the hold, left me alone on the deck with those three coffins and my moody fancies.

And with the coming of the rain the wave crests loomed higher off the starboard quarter, and broke at the crest in wisps of flying spume that took on weird shapes against the blackness of the night. I donned my poncho and drew my neck down into it like a turtle returning to his shell, and looked ahead through the veil of raindrops which fell from the brim of my hat.

A ragged wisp of flying spume detached itself from the crest of a wave and hurdled the vessel near the bow, twisting oddly as it flew, reminding me of the tarpaulin which had fled away from atop the coffins—only, in its whiteness, it had more the appearance of a shroud.

Another wave towered above the quarter, breaking into spray as its top bent over, and the spray took on a ghostly shape for an instant, as though a white-wrapped woman strove to free dragging limbs from the grip of the sea.

We made exceptionally good time that night, as I could guess when, toward morning, the lights of Enriquillo blinked at me through the blackness and the misting rain. Onward we scudded, into the south. I had no fear of reefs, for I had sailed this bleak coast before and knew that the roaring of the reefs could be heard long before they were close enough to place a craft in danger.

Then, crashing forth like the roaring of distant thunder, there came an eery bellowing from the mist-shrouded coastline—bellowing as of a mammoth imprisoned in some deep cavern—bellowing that died away in choking grumbles, as though water had surged up about the nostrils of the mammoth, drowning his bellowing.

I knew then that we had cleared El Guanal and were opposite the spouting rocks of La Rabiza—that dreary lava bed which lies at the eastern end of the heartbreaking Camino de Los Quemados.

I knew that we were making a record for the trip, and when the grayness of dawn appeared in the east I called a negro to the wheel and left orders that I should not be called until he had sighted Beatta Island. I could see the black man's face become a blotchy blue and knew that I dared not trust him alone at the wheel, for his eyes were bulging horribly as they stared at those three grim shapes amidship. I called another black to keep him company and crept into the warm hold, where, closing my nostrils against the fetid odors there, I lay down and fell instantly to sleep.

I awoke suddenly. I don't know how long I had slept, but the in-

creased warmth of the hold told me that the sun was high in the heavens. Subconsciously I knew that the blacks had recovered their spirits and that they had been singing as they worked above me, preparing to disembark. Therefore I wondered at the strained silence that had settled over the *Manelik* just as I opened my eyes in the darkness of the hold. Something was wrong on deck.

I climbed out and looked about me.

The blacks were grouped tensely in the bow, forward of the three coffins, staring ahead at a slimy shape which bobbed up and down in the waves directly in our course. We were in the yellow waters which course through the strait separating Beatta Island from the peninsula; and the island itself, wreathed in spray along the visible coast, was on our starboard bow.

But the blacks, and my three white subordinates, were not looking at the bleak island. Their eyes were intent upon that slimy shape that bobbed in the yellow water ahead of us.

Williams turned to me as I elbowed my way into the bow.

"Looks like a small boat, Mr. Carver," he said. "I told the skipper to run it down, so that it would not be a menace to other small boats which might collide with it in the dark."

As he spoke, our bow, rising high on a wave, dropped suddenly down upon the bobbing cockleshell, splitting the soggy boards asunder and spreading them helter-skelter on the waves.

The old feeling of dread, which had been with me during the long watch of the night just passed, came back again redoubled, when I saw that bedraggled shape which began slowly to sink when the little boat was demolished.

It was the body of a woman long dead, who clasped a tiny babe to her bosom. This I knew from the clothing which still clung to the skeleton; for mother and babe were fleshless—at least where the eye could see—and the dead eyes that looked up at us were empty holes in a pair of grinning skulls!

The two had died miserably of starvation, in sight of land perhaps—where they had floated days and hours until they had died and birds had feasted upon their flesh.

They dropped from sight, mother and babe together, in the yellow waters.

A higher wave than any yet encountered lifted high the bow, and there was a harsher grating sound behind us. As one man we turned to stare.

It was the motion of the ship—nothing more. But the motion had crashed those three coffins together and they had seemed to groan in unison.

"They's talkin', boss!" shouted one of the negroes suddenly. "They's tellin' us jus' as plain that they is empty! They's callin' to one of us this very minute!"

His words sent wild panic surging through the others. But, even though I smote the speaker across the mouth with my open hand and shouted to him to keep silent, he kept up his babbling as though he had not heard me or felt the blow—and blood was trickling from the wound where I had cut his thick lips.

There was a concerted movement aft. I drew my automatic and sprang free of the milling blacks.

"Maybe the coffins were screeching for a victim," I cried, "and the first man to lay hand upon the tiller will be that victim! Who is it to be?"

They halted uncertainly, looking wildly this way and that. One of the blacks stepped forward, pausing a respectful distance away.

"Let's hurry and git offen this boat," he said, "and do something with those coffins! Another day aboard this boat with them will drive these folks to murder."

The man who spoke was the oldest of the lot—a shrewd negro who knew

his kind. I holstered my automatic and nodded.

"All right," I agreed; "forget about the coffins. We'll land on the island before noon."

"Sure!"—it was the irrepressible Williams, backing me up—"why are you fellows worrying about these coffins, anyway? Didn't you hear me say yesterday at the *iduana* that these wooden overcoats were reserved for Gordon, Oliver, and me?"

Once more the fateful prophecy, which I shall remember always.

We were close in now, and the Dominican skipper and I were scanning the coast of Beatta Island for the massive pile of building materials which government boats had dumped off against our coming. I saw it at last, well out on a jutting neck of land. The boom was put over and we headed in, coming to anchor in three fathoms of water.

The skipper shook his head at me as he saw the flying spume along the coast where we must land. He spoke rapidly in Spanish, lowering his voice so that the blacks could not hear.

"Dangerous surf," he said, "hard to land in small boats."

I knew that he spoke truth. It is an axiom of the sea that surf which can be seen from the sea is dangerous for landing. But when I thought of another night aboard the boat with those gruesome coffins I decided to risk it, telling the skipper that I myself would guide the first boat in.

It splashed over the side and I took my place in the stern, standing erect as I had seen Dominican boatmen do, with a steering oar outthrust to serve as a rudder. Such supplies as we needed were dumped in the bottom of the boat, and we cast off, six of the blacks going with me, four of them wielding the oars.

We had to back in, and it required all of my skill to keep us from broaching to. But we made it, with no other accidents than a thorough wetting of all hands. I dreaded to watch the other two boats come in. These would carry a coffin each, while my boat was going back for the third.

I heaved a sigh of relief when the landing was completed without loss of life, for we had passed through the dangerous surf against my better judgment.

I signaled the skipper, and the *Manelik* made sail and scudded away to sea, leaving us alone on bleak Beatta Island.

Just back of us I saw a hole in an outcropping of rock—an ideal place to cache the three coffins. These were disposed of first, and driftwood piled high over the entrance to hide the grim objects from view. A great weight seemed to be lifted from the spirits of the negroes.

The rest of the day was spent in adding our pile of supplies to the great pile of building materials, and in erecting the tents in which we were to live until better shelters could be provided. The negroes sang as they worked, and the old man who had begged for the others aboard the *Manelik* outdid himself as a cook.

When night began to come down upon us, my gloomy forebodings had begun to seem ridiculous. We were all of half a mile from where we had cached the coffins. I prayed—I who had almost forgotten the meaning of prayer—that we might never need them.

We were a cozy encampment. The four tents of the whites stood two and two, entrances facing, while the tents in which the blacks lived in pairs were within calling distance. The supplies which the government had left included a large quantity of kerosene, and I gave the negroes permission to burn their lanterns until 10:30 each evening.

The first night passed without matter of moment, and our first day was spent in clearing the ground for the foundation of the great prison

which the Dominican government had in mind.

What a ghastly place for a prison! An island, miles away from the nearest place where freemen dwelt; peopled, if legend spoke truly, with naught but the spirits of the restless dead, where those who might in future be doomed to live out their lives here in solitude must oft awaken in the silence of the night to listen to the wailing of wandering souls out there upon the sandy tableland which is Beatta Island! That ghastly charnel house of the brutal dictator, Lili! What genius of torture had thought of this place as a prison site?

We dug down where the center of the prison was to be until we came to the solid rock of the island. Then we began to shape the excavation to receive the concrete forms.

An hour before quitting-time we had completed the rough work, with the exception of an uneven residue of earth where one corner was to be. Feeling that we had done well for this day, I gave the men permission to stop for a rest and smoke before clearing away this bit of earth, and when I gave the word again the blacks fell to work heartily, buoyed up by the thoughts of the food which the aged one would have prepared against their coming.

The first man to reach that fateful corner sank his pick deep into the soil.

The point struck against something solid, which gave forth a hollow sound. Knowing the history of the island, by report at least, I dreaded for the diggers to continue. But it was too late to change the site of the prison, even had the matter been of sufficient importance. We might uncover worse things in another place. The eyes of the blacks were large when the sound was heard, and to the last man they fell suddenly silent, giving back from the man with the pick.

This one dropped his implement suddenly and stepped back, wiping his sweaty ebon face with the sleeve of his shirt.

"I don't know what it is, boss," he said quaveringly, "but I don't want to be the nigger that uncovers a coffin!"

Williams seized the discarded pick and plunged it once more into the dirt, every stroke emphasizing his contempt of consequences.

Moldy, fuzzy with dried fungous growth, all but rotted away, it was a coffin, a native one, that Williams uncovered. He dragged it ignominiously forth with his pick. It fell to pieces at once, giving us view of the contents.

Another grinning skeleton! No need to tell us the sex of this one, for there lay the brassy finger-rings and falsely glittering armlets, pitiful evidence of the manner of woman who had rested alone throughout the years, since the edict of Lili, in this pitiful wooden prison of the dead. How many such pitiful remnants might one find about Beatta if one cared to excavate?

The blacks gave back. The man who had dropped the pick began to speak.

"Mr. Williams," he said, "you is a white man and maybe the curse won't touch you; but I'm glad that it wasn't me that disturbed the dead!"

Softly the blacks, as though someone had given a signal, began to sway in unison. Their eyes never left that pitiful shape in the ravished coffin. A muttering sound went up from many throats, and I knew that the superstitious blacks were fortifying themselves against the fear of the departed, mentally crossing their fingers to scare away the "hant." Just what they would have done had the spell not been broken I can not guess.

But Williams spoke.

"Bosh! The dead can't hurt you—nor me! And to prove it I'll take this skull as a souvenir, and keep it in my tent!"

Dropping the pick, he gathered the pitiful baubles of finger-rings and armlets in one hand, and lifted the skull in the other, carrying it with thumb and forefinger through the eye-holes. Realizing that there would be no more work that day, I gave the word and we began the return to camp.

Williams moved aside until he was close to where the waves broke along the shore, then he raised his hand and hurled the finger-rings and armlets far out into the water. But he carried the grinning skull in his hand.

Lights burned later that night, for the negroes sang hymns after the evening meal. I did not like the hymns which they sang, for they reminded me of those I had heard at funerals. We whites gathered in Williams's tent for a pipe and a chat, and I noticed that Williams had secured the skull to the ridgepole with a piece of string. The wind had arisen with the coming of darkness, and the tent rocked with the force of it, while the skull oscillated back and forth.

I did not like it. But Williams, noting how my eyes clung to the thing, laughed aloud and poked fun at me.

As I returned to my tent to turn in, my heart was heavy again with a nameless foreboding.

I AWOKE in the night with a scream of terror ringing in my ears. It came from the tent of Williams. My hand trembled sadly as I touched the flame of a match to the wick of my lantern. Gordon and Oliver were shivering in their underwear before the closed flap of Williams's tent, afraid to enter, waiting for me to take the initiative.

Taking my courage firmly in hand I undid the flap and entered.

Williams, in his struggles with the unknown, had writhed free of his covering, and now lay sprawled across his cot, his feet touching the floor of his tent. I shall never forget the look of horror on his dead face, nor the gaping wound in his throat where it seemed that the teeth of some savage animal had torn his life out. Red blood dripped from the open wound to stain the coverlets.

Involuntarily my eyes went to that swinging skull. Only it did not swing at the ridgepole now.

I found it in the shadows beyond Williams's bunk, and recoiled in horror when I noted that the grinning mouth was stained with damp crimson.

There was nothing to do but wait for morning. Gordon and Oliver returned slowly and sadly to their tents, while I paused to refasten the flap of the death tent.

Before I entered my tent I lifted my lantern high and looked all around. Just within the circle of light cast by the lantern, between me and the sea to the east, I made out the wavering outlines of a woman! She grinned horribly at me with fleshless lips. She lifted her hands in a mocking gesture and I caught the gleam of brassy rings on her fingers, the false glitter of glass armlets! As I stared, while a chill crept slowly along my body to the roots of my hair, a drop of water slid from one of the armlets and fell to the ground.

I knew the woman at once, for in the lesser known streets of many cities in all parts of the world I have gazed into the haunting eyes of many another of her drab sisterhood.

I took a step toward her and she fled into the night—straight out toward the sea in the darkness to the east. I heard a weird laugh when she had disappeared—a laugh that seemed to fly on the wings of the landborne breeze, whipping past me to die away among the sand dunes in the center of the island. She was gone.

Horror had reached its climax that night. I returned to my tent, and did not close my eyes until morning came.

I know that I would not have pursued that woman into the darkness

for all the gold in Christendom! But with morning came a new horror.

We three whites arose ahead of the negroes, hoping to keep the knowledge of Williams's death from them, for a time at least, and bore the body to the shallow cavern where we had cached the caskets—to find that the driftwood closing the entrance had been ruthlessly hurled aside, and one of the caskets drawn forth from the opening.

The wooden top had been carefully removed, disclosing the metal casket inside—and the metal top had been unscrewed and shifted so that the coffin lay open there, ready to receive the dead body of Williams!

3

WE PAUSED aghast. The body of Williams fell from our nerveless hands and slumped soggily to the ground beside the coffin. Who, or what, had opened it in readiness? Not the blacks, for nothing could have driven them from their tents after nightfall, last night especially. Not one of us. What had the mysterious woman had to do with it?

I stooped to the sand about the coffin and searched carefully for marks of feet. There was none. I tried to explain it by telling myself that the waves from the beach might have surged up about the coffin, erasing the marks from the sand. But it was no use. The marks of the highest waves stopped well below the entrance to the cavern where the other two coffins lay, and here could be found only those marks which we ourselves had left.

Could there, after all, be anything in the legend of the restless ghosts of Beatta? I cursed myself for my folly in even entertaining such a thought; yet what had moved the coffin and opened it to receive the dead?

My head was busy with weird imaginings as we lowered the body of Williams into the coffin and screwed home the ponderous lid. How would we explain to the blacks the absence of Williams?

What had killed Williams?

That grinning skull? Impossible! It might, snapping the twine suspending it to the ridgepole, have fallen upon him in such a way that the mouth had struck his throat. But what had caused the dead molars to close in the death grip? Had the force of the falling skull awakened Williams—and had he died of fright at seeing the gruesome thing at his throat? Had that woman in gaudy finery whom I had seen in the circle of light done the slaying? Was she a flesh-and-blood woman? Or—but I refused to pursue this fantastic line of thought. I remembered the drop of water which had fallen from one of the armlets which she had worn, and, remembering this, I recalled that Williams had hurled into the sea the counterpart of this very armlet which we had found in the coffin. Could there be any connection between two such circumstances so widely at variance?

We returned the now occupied coffin to the cavern beside those other two, and came back to camp, to find the blacks washing up for the morning meal.

Some strange idea caused me to precede the others to the scene of the excavation. I was glad, later, that I had done so. I dropped down into the excavation and hurried to the spot where the aged, ravished coffin had lain the night before.

The coffin was just as we had left it, but there was not a single bone left of the skeleton which had so frightened the negroes! There had been plenty of bones yesterday. Where had they gone?

I stooped and ran my fingers through the loose soil under the demolished coffin. They encountered nothing but the newly turned soil.

Then I rubbed my eyes in unbelief, for, leading away from the spot toward our encampment, barely dis-

cernible, I saw the marks of feet which must have fallen as lightly as thistledown. Human feet. But feet that were bare and fleshless. Naked bones of a skeleton! I was close above them, stooping, and when I straightened the prints faded out. I stooped again and saw them. On hands and knees I followed their trace to the edge of the excavation, and saw where a little mound of sand had fallen down as though someone had loosened it in climbing out. I arose to a standing position at the edge and looked over, half expecting to see the marks of bony hands where a skeleton had placed them to assist in the leap. The marks were not there, but those of the feet were, right at the edge, as though the bony figure had leaped—or been wafted—straight into the air and out!

Hurriedly I erased these marks with my hand. As I did so the blacks, headed by the wan-faced Gordon and Oliver, arrived and began to drop into the excavation. One of the negroes, he who had first driven pick into that residue of earth in the corner, looked at me queerly, a little suspiciously.

"What for you come here early, boss?" he demanded.

"I came to gather up this junk and hurl it into the sea," I replied, indicating the spot where the skeleton had been. I complimented myself mentally for my quickness of wit. I was glad that his was slower moving, for had he but looked at the sand he would have known that I lied, as there were no footprints leading seaward.

He dropped heavily into the pit, stooping as he bent to lessen the shock of his fall.

And his eyes fixed suddenly on the ground before him. I knew what he saw. His face turned a slaty gray. I had not rubbed out those faint prints of the bony feet, and the negro had seen one of the marks. But he arose and the print seemed to vanish. He rubbed a black hand over his forehead, a look of puzzlement creasing his brow. He had first driven pick into that aged coffin, and I could read that he was vividly remembering.

The blacks worked that day as I had never seen them work before. They knew that they must carry out their contract with me or receive no money, and as I had not made them a per diem rate they worked far more swiftly than they otherwise would have done. They were anxious to finish the job and be away from haunted Beatta Island. I did not blame them.

By nightfall most of the concrete forms had been fashioned and placed in position. The work was well done, too, and I felt lighthearted for the first time since coming to Beatta. Fear seemed to have removed its hand from the hearts of the blacks—all except the one who had seen that faint mark of the bony foot at the bottom of the excavation. He had scarcely uttered a word all day, and when he had spoken in answer to some order of mine, his tone had been very subdued. I knew that, for him, this night to come would be filled with dread.

It is well that the future is denied to the vision of mortals—for the night to come was to be a night of dread for all of us.

Its beginning was not promising. For as soon as the sun had gone down, black clouds gathered swiftly in the south, rushing toward us from the direction of Curaçao and Venezuela. A strong wind began to set toward us out of the east, as though it were funneling out from the lips of Mona Passage. The waves began to break upon the shingle with menacing roars, drowning out the voices of the blacks in their flapping tents. Most of this eastern coast of Beatta was honeycombed by sea-worn caverns, and the waves rushed savagely into these, drawing back with sullen, awe-inspiring grumbles to renew their attack upon the ageless stone. Wind screeched across the tableland, lifting the sand from the tops of dunes and carrying it away as though it

had been as light as the spume at the crests of breaking waves.

Then the rain began to fall—a steady, torrential downpour. It roared upon our tents, threatening to crush them down with its weight. Ever and anon it paused, as though resting before a new attack, and through these pauses we could hear the roaring of mighty waves in the distant caverns, the moaning of the seas as they returned again. Moans that caused the listener to shiver. Moans that ended in wild, eery shrieks —shrieks that sounded like the concerted laughter of a host of shallow women.

I stepped to the door of my tent and looked out. It was so black outside that I could not see the door of Gordon's tent, the entrance of which faced mine.

But an odd breeze fanned my face —a breeze which I could feel in spite of the rush of the downpouring rain. I knew that someone or something had passed me in the darkness, heading toward the sea to the east.

"Gordon!" I called softly. "Oliver!"

No answer from either.

"I'se right here, boss," came a whisper almost in my face; "it's on'y me, Jamaica!"

I stepped back, and the grizzled face of the old cook peered in through the flap of my tent. As I did not forbid him, he undid the flap and entered.

"Boss," he said seriously, without preamble, "they's strange doin's around here. I wasn't out there when Smith drove his pick into that old coffin, but the others told me all about it. Smith was in my tent tonight after supper and we tried to talk. But somethin' was wrong with him. He on'y half listened to me, an' kep' turnin' his head toward the tent-door as though he was listenin' for somethin'. He was scared stiff about somethin'—face was gray almost—an' his lips kep' movin' as though he was sayin' somethin' to himself. He got up quick-like and went out. I waited for a minute or two and followed him. Boss, he didn't go to his tent! He went past here this very minute, headin' toward the sea—an' I was afraid to foller him further than your tent. An' say, boss, where's Mr. Williams gone to?"

I felt that I could tell this old darky the truth; felt that he could be depended upon.

"Jamaica," I said, "Mr. Williams is dead. Something or somebody killed him last night!"

I saw the old man's limbs begin to tremble, but his eyes looked squarely into mine. Spiritually he was braver than his fellows.

"Boss," he quavered, "does you think Charlie Smith killed him?"

This idea had never occurred to me. Why should it? But what was he doing abroad now? Something stronger than superstitious fear had driven him forth into the raging night.

I buckled my holster on without making answer to the old man, and lowered the hammer upon a live cartridge—something I never do with an automatic, proof of the tension under which my mind was laboring.

I stepped out into the night, noting only that the tents of the other two whites were dark before I set out from the camp. The brave old darky, Jamaica, followed close at my heels, and I was glad of his company.

I stopped when I discovered that my eyes were not equal to the darkness, and spoke hurriedly to the old negro, who unhesitatingly took the lead. I sensed that the chase led toward the excavation.

The rain stopped before we reached the works, and for a few minutes a yellow moon looked down upon Beatta—for a few minutes only, through a rift in the sullen clouds which were gathering swiftly again to discharge their contents; but it was long enough for me to see a terrible sight.

For we stood looking down into the excavation. In its center was Charlie Smith, the shirt torn away from his black chest. Snarls that might have issued from some brute beast came from his lips and, his huge fists clenched into knotted balls, he was striking, flailing, feinting—his breath coming forth in labored gasps, while he fought there as though he battled against a multitude.

Yet there wasn't a soul in that pit except Charlie Smith himself! I watched him spellbound, wondering what terrors he imagined himself battling. He stopped, finally, leaning panting against one of the concrete forms, his eyes fastened upon the spot where that aged coffin had lain. Then his eyes popped open wide and his head turned as though he watched the measured approach of something we could not see. In my imagination I could see it too, a formless wraith that arose from the ground and crossed the floor of the excavation, passing near Charlie Smith and oozing up the side of the pit.

Charlie Smith turned wearily and followed the unseen something out of the pit, and away toward the sea to the east. I heard him mutter distinctly, "Lordy! Lordy! I'se comin'! Don't stare at me like that!"

Jamaica and I fell in behind him, and he did not seem to see us. Just above the surge of the waves he turned to the right, his eyes still fixed, apparently, upon something that moved on ahead of him. What was it? I did not see it, so I can not say; but from the set look on the face of the negro I knew that it must be something ghastly.

Fifteen minutes, or more, we followed Charlie Smith. He was skirting the edge of the cliffs now, southward of where we had cached the three coffins. Then he paused suddenly and his eyes turned slowly out to sea, as though whatever he had been following had suddenly taken wings. He turned toward the sea, and before I could guess his intention he had taken a step forward. Arms wide flung, he dropped out of sight, while the shout which would have issued from my lips died in my throat. I hurried forward in time to see the waves break over his mangled body below, well out from the cliff. When the waves had given back to the sea, the body was gone, claimed by the resistless might of the Caribbean.

Up to where I stood, apparently from the shadows at the base of the cliff, came the throaty laugh of a woman! I searched the shadows with my eyes and could see nothing. Almost at once the laugh came again, far down the coast—from such a distance that I knew, had it been a living woman, she could not have moved so swiftly.

I turned about and ran with all my speed back to the encampment. Jamaica was right at my heels, too.

I ran to Gordon's tent and shouted to him. He answered sleepily, and I bade him rise and dress at once. Whatever was going on here, I refused to believe it the work of restless spirits, and I meant to investigate. But not alone!

I went to the tent of Oliver and shouted to him. No answer. I procured the lantern from my own tent and entered Oliver's. It was empty, the covers on the bed thrown aside as though Oliver had risen in haste. Where had he gone?

Gordon joined me, and we returned to the spot where Charlie Smith had stepped off to his death. On the way I explained what had happened on my previous visit. We skirted the cliff, Gordon carrying my lantern in his hand. We stopped about where I had heard the laugh and looked about for footprints, finding none.

"Nothing doing," said Gordon softly. "Now to see what has become of Oliver."

He would have said more, but at the moment he finished the sentence a rasping sound came to us from just

to the north—a sound as of a rusty nail being drawn forth from stout wood.

My heart was heavy with dread as we hurried toward the cavern where we had cached the coffins. Its mouth, which we had closed a second time after placing Williams to rest, was open again!

Inside were the three coffins, just as we had left them.

But were they? Raising my lantern high I studied the center coffin carefully, and saw that the nails which secured the wooden cover had been drawn almost wholly forth, loosening the lid.

I breathed a sigh of relief, glad that we had arrived before that second coffin had been drawn out upon the sand. It would be well to see, however, just how far the unknown agency had gone before our approach had scared it away.

The lid lifted easily and dropped into the sand beside the coffin.

A chill struck me as I saw that the screws in the metal lid beneath had also been tampered with. Feverishly Gordon and I knelt and completed the job of releasing that lid.

When we flung it back at last we found ourselves gazing into the set face of Oliver—dead in the coffin there, his head bashed in as though a great stone had been dropped upon it!

Speechless, I turned to stare into the face of Gordon. His eyes were fixed in horror upon the dead face of Oliver; his right hand was slowly making the sign of the cross before his own body.

Finally he turned to look at me. His lips moved and I caught the words which issued from his lips—words that came in a barely audible whisper: "Remember the joking prophecy of Williams, Carver? He has been right so far!"

Slowly he turned and gazed down at the third coffin. Slowly his arm upraised as he pointed.

"Something tells me, Carver, that I shall soon be resting in that one!"

4

GORDON had completely lost his nerve. This was very evident next day when word got around of the deaths of Williams and Oliver. Gordon was listless with his work and his face was as drawn and yellow as faded parchment.

The blacks had called roll among themselves and had noted with superstitious fear that there were thirteen of us left in the party. Unlucky number, unlucky almost since the origin of numbers. I heard them muttering among themselves, asking of one another who would fill the third coffin. Two blacks had disappeared since the departure from Barahona; two whites had gone the way of no returning. Would the next one be white or black? Gordon was always quavering that he knew in his soul he was fated to fill that third coffin. He said it so often that the blacks began to think he was possessed of prophetic vision. I suppose that in their hearts they prayed that he might be right. Intense gloom hung over the encampment on Beatta. But the blacks worked at top speed.

I was thinking deeply. I had known when leaving Barahona that *El Presidente,* fleet yacht of the republic's chief executive, was due to visit these waters shortly for a few days of turtle fishing. It would put in at Beatta, or always had done so heretofore—would certainly do so now so that the president could make an inspection and see how well I was carrying out my contract with the Dominican government.

Knowing this when leaving Barahona, I had planned to return on her to the capital to arrange for a checking account with the International Banking Corporation, leaving the work in the hands of the three whites. But two of them were dead, and the third, Gordon, had lost his nerve.

"Why are you niggers fretting over the fact that we number thirteen? Don't you know that the third coffin is reserved for me?"

The next day after the death of Oliver I'll wager that Gordon made that remark at least a dozen times. A croaking raven. Nerveless. Superstitious even as the negroes were superstitious.

I dreaded for night to come again. Gordon dreaded it with a dread that was ghastly to witness. The negroes glanced up at the sun as it sailed into the west, no doubt wishing that, like Joshua, they might cause it to stand still.

It was very evident that I could not return to the capital on *El Presidente*. She would be due tomorrow or the next day. Could I prevent the negroes from boarding her? The president would have a military bodyguard and I foresaw that I might even be compelled to beg their aid in keeping my blacks upon the island.

Then night came, as different from last night as could well be imagined. The stars were shining like jewels in the sky. The air was dank and sultry—Californians would call it earthquake weather. And the silence could almost be felt. Even the murmur of the waves upon the shingle was muted, as though they whispered quaint secrets. The waves that came in were oily and did not break. One could see clear across the tableland of Beatta's crest. Hummocks of wind-worn rocks stood out like weird ghosts—silent ghosts that waited for something to happen. That was it—an air of weird expectancy!

The lights burned long in the tents of the negroes that night. I remained awake until after midnight, reading a book I had brought with me. I could hear the subdued murmuring of the negroes—murmurs that were weighted with dread and expectancy—always expectancy—waiting for a new horror to descend. But the silence held.

Yawning, at last I threw off my clothes and crawled under the covers; then threw them off again impatiently, because of the sultriness which still held sway over Beatta.

Then I slept.

When I awoke it was still dark, still silent. Lights were out in the tents of the negroes. Murmurs had been stilled by the hand of sleep.

What had awakened me? Why this feeling of horror that obsessed me upon awaking? Down in my heart I knew that something had happened to add to the horrors already experienced. I threw on my clothes and stepped to the tent of Gordon.

When I found it empty I was not surprized. This had been fated from the beginning. Had Gordon gone the way of the others?

In doubt as to which way he had gone, I stepped away from the camp and began to cast a wide circle about it. I found his footprints at last. I heaved a sigh of relief when I saw that they did not lead in the direction of the third coffin, but away across Beatta toward the west. I searched the tableland with my eyes and could see nothing that moved.

A chill had now begun to make itself felt. The night was still bright, proof that dawn was yet a long way off. A bluish sort of haze hung close to the ground, defining strangely the shapes on Beatta which appeared above the level of the island's crest.

I was afraid to follow those footprints into the west!

I called softly to old Jamaica, and he joined me at once, fully clothed. He had turned in with all his clothes on. Had the old man been lying there in his tent expecting my call?

We began to follow those prints. We followed them for two hours. And as we strode through the sand our feet ever and anon kicked up odd things from the ground. Bones! But whether human or animal we never paused to ascertain.

The trail ended at the very edge of a high cliff which looks into the south toward Alta Vela and that island's little sister, Alto Velito. We could just make out the odd shape of Los Frailes across the water—that weird island which looks like a submarine rising from the deep.

There were no steps returning, and deep water lapped at the cold stones far below our feet. Gordon had gone. In my heart I did not blame him. Rather than face the menace of the third coffin he had taken the easier way out—going far to do it out of consideration for the blacks and for me.

This was my thought, and it made me feel infinitely better. I waved my hand toward the water below, mute farewell to a brother white man. Then we two, Jamaica and I, turned about to retrace our steps. As we turned I gazed toward the scrub which grows on top of the hill directly opposite Alta Vela, and for a moment I fancied I caught the movement of a white garment against the bluish shadow of the stunted forest—as though a spying woman had darted in among the trees. But I set it down to disordered imagination.

Gordon had gone, and we were twelve.

When we again entered the encampment I caught the gleam of bobbing lights across the water to the east and knew that *El Presidente* was ahead of schedule, coming in toward the island at half-speed. It would be daylight before she would anchor. I went to bed again and slept until morning.

I rowed out to her next morning to pay my respects to the president. He was cordial in his greetings, complimented me on the progress already made, and promised to anchor again for an hour or two before his return to the capital. But he did not go ashore.

I remained aboard until the vessel weighed anchor for the short trip along the coast toward Jacmel. It would be back in three days. And during those three days my men worked like so many black beavers. The prison walls arose by leaps and bounds, surpassing my rosiest expectations. The blacks had regained their usual good spirits. The ghosts of Beatta had, apparently, been laid with the passing of Gordon.

It was dusk of the fourth morning when *El Presidente* again anchored offshore from our camp. And just in time, for a wind broke with apalling fury. I had no fear for the safety of the craft. She was on a lee shore and was stout enough to ride out a regular hurricane, into which the blow threatened to develop before morning.

The night was even worse than that during which Williams had been slain. All the superstitious fear of the negroes came back. Their cries, prayers and exhortations never abated until the sun came up out of the east. And when it rose, they came to me in a body, begging for leave to go aboard the yacht and return with her to Barahona, where the president intended to touch en route to the capital. When I refused they became sullen. Their spokesman threatened, in the name of the men, to take the small boats and go aboard anyway. I had to do something, and more to secure an opportunity for planning than anything else, I promised to row out and put the whole thing up to the president.

I was really surprized when he did not laugh at the whole story which I told him. He bowed his head in thought. After all, thought I, this man was a Dominican, and though an educated man, even he might put some stock in the curse which seemed to hang over Beatta.

"Tell you what, Mr. Carver," he said at length; "these three coffins are the cause of the whole thing. Put

them aboard and we'll take care of the matter of returning the two bodies to the families in the United States. And it might be a good idea, at that, to take the whole crew of you into Barahona with us. There will be a big *fiesta* there tomorrow, which the blacks would perhaps like to attend. I am breaking up my fishing-trip to honor the affair with my presence for a few hours and I intend to return anyway. Go up and back with us and I'll wager that, once away from Beatta for awhile, the blacks will forget the whole gruesome happenings and be quite willing to return to their work. Leave your camp as it is."

I was a bit dubious of this, but the president was wise in the ways of his people and might be counseling well. I agreed, and the blacks shouted their delight when I returned and informed them what the president had said. Every last man of them promised to return to Beatta whenever I said the word. The negro will promise anything to gain his point.

When we heaved anchor and scudded gracefully away from Beatta Island, the three coffins were in the hold. The two which held the bodies were plainly marked so that even the most ignorant stevedores could not mistake them. The third coffin was slightly apart from the others.

I looked back at the framework of the prison I had contracted to build, and something told me I would never return to complete it. I could not explain the premonition. It weighted my heart as though with lead, for the agent of the president who gave contracts in the name of the government held a fat check of mine which would go to the government if I did not live up to my contract. It would ruin my credit throughout the islands, for the International Bank had loaned me that money on the strength of its belief in my ability to produce results.

We slid in along the dock at Barahona before noon of the next day, having anchored for three hours off Enriquillo while the president went ashore to look around.

I went at once to the *iduana* and looked up Lieutenant Wilson. I told him bitterly of all that had befallen me. He was the personification of sympathy.

"Thank God, Wilson," I said, "we had no need of the third coffin! Come down to the dock and I'll turn it over to you."

My blacks rolled a handcar down along the dock tracks and brought it to pause beside *El Presidente*. I went aboard to supervise the unloading of the grim wooden box. The negroes carried it from the hold to the deck. And they joked about it as though all those horrors on Beatta had never been. It raised my spirits, for it made me think that the president had been wise indeed.

They fixed the huge rope sling under the coffin, adjusted the windlass, lifted the coffin high above the deck and out over the dock. The windlass halted with a jerk as its operator judged the location of the handcar upon which it was to be deposited.

That sudden jerk was a terrible blow to all my newborn plans, for the rotten rope about the coffin broke. The windlass man shouted a warning to the men who waited below. These sprang free with the agility of monkeys. The huge coffin, weighing more than five hundred pounds when empty, dropped like a plummet, crashing full tilt against the edge of the handcar.

That coffin must indeed have rested long in the cryptlike room beneath the *iduana*, giving the ants of the tropics time to get in their devastating work, for the rotten wooden outer covering of the coffin smashed into kindling wood and the metal coffin fell free; the metal lid, unscrewed, slid into the waters of Neiba Bay!

I found myself staring in stark horror upon the dead white face of Gordon! His head, even as Oliver's, had been beaten in with a stone!

Ghastly realization came to me as I noted that the feet of Gordon were unshod—bare white things there in the coffin!

Who, or what, had walked across bleak Beatta that night in Gordon's shoes?

When I was able to raise horrified eyes from that terrible figure in the coffin below, I saw that my maddened negroes were in full flight up the dock toward Barahona. They disappeared up the street running west from the *iduana,* and I never saw them again.

I had failed miserably. Never would I again be able to recruit labor to complete that prison on Beatta; for, knowing Santo Domingo, I was sure that the story would be all over the republic within the space of three days. The blacks would see to that.

It was a mighty silent and thoughtful man, I can tell you, who voyaged on into the capital aboard *El Presidente.*

THREE months ago I again gazed upon Beatta, from the sea. I was aboard a United States government tug, en route to Guantanamo Bay. The skipper was garrulous. He knew Santo Domingo and the legends of the country. I had been bored to death with his tiresome narratives, all of which were too replete with personal pronouns. But when we were in the blue water between Alta Vela and Beatta he pointed to a thatched hut on the shore of Beatta, just below that memorable forest of scrub trees, and told me a story that brought me to mute attention.

"There is a story to that island, young man, let me tell you! It is said to be haunted by the ghosts of wild women sent there by Lili to die. It seems that the government wanted to build a prison there a year or so ago and gave the contract to a credulous young American who, of course, was required to deposit a heavy bond. The man who handled government contracts couldn't stand the pressure of all that money in his hand, so he decided to force the young fellow to forfeit the coin. How to do it? He made the ghosts on the island do it, aided by his own mistress, who, with two Dominican soldiers, occupied that hut you see right across there. She pulled off a bunch of hocus-pocus on the island, I've been told. And the English negroes, through an old reprobate known as Jamaica, were induced to come in on the deal—all except two of them, who were conveniently put out of the way. Two or three white men were bumped off, too, they tell me. Lot of gossip about three coffins, but I don't remember the whole of that part of the story. Spooky-looking place, ain't it, Mr. Carver? Carver, Carver—seems to me that was the name of the young fellow they bamboozled. Ever hear of him?"

"No!" I shouted.

"Well, don't get sore about it! I'm just telling you the story. There must be some truth in it, too. For after we have passed that high cliff yonder you can look back over the tableland of the island and see the remains of the prison, which was never finished. Stay up here on the bridge with me and I'll point it out to you."

But when we had passed the cliff to which he referred, and which I remembered so well, I was down in the wardroom, deeply immersed in a book—not one word of which I remember.

The whole thing explained at last.

But I couldn't help wondering what had come over Charlie Smith that night. Wondered what he had thought himself battling there in that excavation. Wondered who or what he thought himself following as he

walked over that other cliff to his death in the waters of the Caribbean. This much at least has never been explained—unless he was one of those Jamaica had not won over, and had gone off his head with superstitious fear.

But I don't like to think that. Not only does it make my blood boil with anger at the man who had mulcted me—a man who had since been slain by one of his mistresses—but it makes me doubt my own spiritual courage in the face of the unknown.

THE BASILISK

THE malignant eye of the basilisk has passed into a proverb, as something enticing, yet deadly. Authorities in ancient times differed as to whether the basilisk was more like a serpent, lizard or dragon. All agreed that it was comparatively small, yet very dangerous.

Pliny, the Roman naturalist of the First Century, said of it, "All who behold its eyes fall dead upon the spot. It is produced in the province of Cyrene, and is not more than twelve fingers in length. A white spot or star it carries on the head, and sets it out like a coronet or diadem. When it hisses, all other serpents fly from it; and it does not advance its body like the others, by a succession of folds, but moves along, erect and upright, upon the middle. It destroys all shrubs, not only by its contact, but those even that it has breathed upon; it burns up all the grass, too, and breaks stones, so tremendous is its noxious influence. It was formerly a general belief that if a man on horseback killed one of these animals with a spear, the poison would run up the weapon and kill not only the rider but the horse as well. To this dreadful monster the effluvium of the weasel is fatal, a thing that has often been tried with success, for kings have often desired to see its body when killed; so true is it that it has pleased Nature that there should be nothing without its antidote. The weasel is thrown into the burrow of the basilisk, which is easily known from the soil around it being infected. The weasel destroys the basilisk by its odor, but dies itself in this struggle of Nature against its own self."

In later centuries it was claimed that the weasel could not kill the basilisk until after it had eaten some of the herb called rue. The basilisk was said to be dreadfully afraid of the weasel, and would flee at sight of it.

A genus of ugly South American lizardlike reptiles has been named Basilisk because of a sort of hood or pouch at the back of the head supposed to resemble the fabulous basilisk's "diadem."

THROUGH the VEIL

by ANNE M. BILBRO

"He half dragged his prisoner to headquarters."

OLA MADIN was not a detective. She was not even educated, but she possessed that indefinable, intangible thing, a sixth sense. A sense of knowing things. No one knew how or why she knew; Ola herself did not know how she knew. She only knew that she knew.

It had always been so, since she was a child. Ola looked straight beyond the surface of visible things, sometimes through the invisible veil, and saw the truth.

So it was that when old Mr. Lenn came to her humble cottage by the sea looking for room and board, Ola took him in promptly, where many another would have wanted to think twice about it. For Mr. Lenn was worn, and shabby, and silent, and he had no baggage except one battered and almost dilapidated old traveling-bag.

Mrs. Agger was frankly doubtful. She was Ola's only other lodger, and she worked in the laundry of one of the fashionable hotels in the near-by beach resort. Manda Agger was glad to rest her tired body at night in Ola's poor but homelike little house in the fishing village which lay on the fringe of the sea-coast town. They were women of fifty.

"You don't know a thing about that old man, Ola," cautioned Mrs. Agger, after Mr. Lenn had been with them a short time.

"They ain't no harm in him," Ola had answered.

"But he's mighty silent," persisted Manda. "Never has nothin' to say. And he's got a kind of *listenin'* look that seems queer to me. Carries a mighty fat pocketbook, too, for such a pore-lookin' man."

Ola waved the subject aside with a brief gesture. "That ain't nothin'. Don't worry about him," she replied.

Ola understood. He was just a tired, lonely old man; his silence merely a relaxation, a settling down into long-wished-for quiet and peace. No. He was not rich. The fat pocketbook probably contained all he had in the world, and he was doling it out weekly to cover his small needs during his remaining years. Not many years; somehow Ola knew that, too. And as to the listening look, she had also seen that look in the tired old eyes, and she knew for what he was listening: a voice, but no one besides the old man would hear that voice.

There was only one room upstairs, with steps leading up from the small front room, which was kept for general use. Ola and Manda shared a room at one side, and the kitchen was at the back. This upper room Ola prepared for Mr. Lenn. From her own bed she took a comforter to soften the hardness of his mattress. She installed a small wood-stove. The old man might like to smoke his pipe by his own fire sometimes on cold winter days, or nights, and driftwood on that stormy coast was plentiful. One need never want for a cheery blaze.

When Mr. Lenn ventured timidly to ask if he might wash his shirts and underwear in her laundry tub, Ola promptly took the matter in her own hands.

"Lor', Mr. Lenn, men don't know nothin' about them things. You just get up your clothes every Monday mornin', and I'll do 'em for you."

Hesitatingly then, he asked the price. But Ola's clear eyes saw it all. Money for laundry hadn't been figured on in the little weekly stipend which came from that worn and bulging old pocketbook.

"Price?" said Ola, surprizedly. "Why, it won't be enough to amount to nothin'. 'Tain't a bit of trouble. I have to wash my own things, and there's the water and suds all ready. Tell you what, Mr. Lenn; if you wanter do it, you can pay me by—er—I wonder if you know anything about dressin' fish?"

Mr. Lenn brightened. Why, yes, he used to be quite a fisherman, and sailor. He knew all about dressing fish. He had already watched Ola coming in from sea in her little fishing-boat, bringing with her a mess of fish for supper. Ola had not asked him to go out for a trip. At a glance it could be seen he was too frail, and the sea was sometimes rough. But he liked to sit on the rocks and watch the fishers going and coming.

"Well now," said Ola, "I'll tell you what. I'll keep your clothes washed and mended, and you can help about the fish on the nights I have 'em for supper, if you feel like it. And sometimes when you are goin' for a walk over the town, you might do some little erran' for me, and save me the trip. So you see, me doin' the washin' ain't nothin' a-tall." Ola looked away, for she had seen a sudden mist in his eyes.

She needed no help about the fish, or the errands—sturdy Ola, with her strong back and limbs; but Mr. Lenn didn't know that, and eagerly he agreed to the exchange of service.

Ola's words were few and awkward, but he felt the underlying kindness; for a long time kindness had been a rare thing in his life. It was more than comforting—it was exhilarating—to feel that there was a place where he might still be of use. Mr. Lenn grew brisk and cheerful, though never talkative. A great contentment had come to the old man. Ola's shabby house was a blessed haven of rest. When he wakened in the morning there was no more of the old apathy of lying an hour longer in bed—just to shorten the day. Days are long when one has nothing to do. Now it was quite different. There were definite and interesting things to do. First the early breakfast in Ola's

homely little kitchen. Fresh, strong coffee. Substantial wheat-cakes. Always an egg for the old man. But more than all, the air of home. The clean, bare floor; the cheap blue china; the glow from the wood-stove; the fresh, salt tang of the sea. Far, far back into the years it carried Mr. Lenn, to the time when he was a boy. He liked sitting with Ola and Mrs. Agger at the little round kitchen table. He liked listening to the quiet chatter of the women.

After breakfast there were odd jobs which one might find for the looking. Driftwood to be gathered. A loose plank to be nailed tight. A fence-rail to mend. Mr. Lenn was orderly and tidy; he liked to make things shipshape. Then there would be his quiet hour on the rocks. Watching the sea; smoking his pipe. Then lunch. Rye-bread and cheese, and a cup of hot tea. Plenty; quite plenty. Wouldn't there be supper later on when Mrs. Agger came from her work, and Ola had fried the day's catch of fish, and the three of them again sat in the friendly, cheery little kitchen?

About three times a week in the middle of the afternoon Ola would push out in her small boat; out just a bit beyond the shallows; not too far; and when the sun began to slant low Mr. Lenn would be waiting at the beach with his knife and pail of fresh water. As Ola eased her boat in and made the line fast, he would ask, with interest, "How many?"

"Plenty for supper," Ola would answer; sometimes, "Plenty for supper and breakfast." Then she would pass up the path to the kitchen, while Mr. Lenn, by the water's edge, skilfully dressed the fish. Oh, there was plenty to do now! No more lonely, empty days. No more feeling of being cut off from the world, of having outlived his time and usefulness.

Of his past life he had spoken only once. His family had always been small, and he had outlived them all. His more distant relatives had thought he ought to enter a home for old men, and he hadn't wanted to do so.

"Why, the idea! Anybody as useful as you! Course you didn't want to, Mr. Lenn," Ola had said.

That was all. But Ola was constantly finding little things that Mr. Lenn might do, and the old man had not in a long time been so happy as he was in this humble little home.

Sometimes a rainy day would come when there could be no working at jobs out of doors, or walks by the sea, and Mr. Lenn could only sit quietly by the window, with his pipe. But if the distant, listening look came into his eyes, Ola was always ready to meet it. "Well, I do declare, if time ain't slipped up on me!—Mr. Lenn, *would* you mind startin' up the fire in the stove while I get my potatoes peeled?"—or something of the kind.

Quickly the shadow would vanish from the old man's face. It was good to be needed.

Gradually his seventy-six years weighed less heavily upon him. His step grew more elastic. He began to take daily walks into town. But he was never late for his lunch; never out long; always back before sunset.

Manda had quickly lost all her suspicions, and was frankly glad of Mr. Lenn's presence. "It's real nice to have him, Ola," she would say. "So quiet and willin' to help, and not a bit of trouble. I always did think it gave a place a more homelike look to have a man around—I mean the right kind of man—doin' little things, or settin' around smokin' his pipe, even if it is a old man. Makes me think of when I was a child and my gran'father useter'——"

Manda would chatter on, and Ola, saying nothing, would feel a deep satisfaction as she glanced out of the window and saw Mr. Lenn raking the little yard in the early morning sunlight, while she and Manda prepared breakfast.

He had now been living at Ola's house for many months—nearly a year—and yet the shabby leather purse still bulged. The thing was simple. When a large bill was changed, a number of smaller bills were stowed away, and this kept Mr. Lenn's pocketbook quite prosperous-looking. Ola had often thought it unwise for the old man to carry his purse constantly with him on his walks and rambles. But Mr. Lenn always returned safe from his short excursions, and Ola had ceased to worry.

However, a day came at last when Mr. Lenn went out and did not return. He was not waiting at the rocks when Ola came in from sea with her supper fish. He had not come when supper was ready. There was a deep crease in Ola's brow. She moved silently about her duties, but her hands were unsteady, her gaze vacant.

"Might be he had supper with somebody in town—that friend of his, maybe.—What's his name?" vaguely suggested Manda.

"Calls himself Jodson. 'Taint his name," said Ola.

"Lor' now, Ola, you don't know that—I thought Mr. Jodson seemed like a real clever kind of person. Got a honest face, and looks you straight in the eye," from Manda.

"*Too* straight," replied Ola.

The evening wore on, the red glow in the west giving way to purple; then violet-gray; then the velvet black of night, starlit. Still Mr. Lenn had not come.

"Hours passed. "Better go to bed, Ola," said Mrs. Agger wearily. "You know Mr. Lenn come in sudden, without no word; and now, might be he's just left the same way. Might be he'll be back tomorrow, or soon, just the same way as he come."

There was a strange glow in Ola's eyes, as she answered in a dull, lifeless voice, "He ain't comin' back."

"Well, do tell! You think he's just left for good like that?—Now *I* believe we'll hear from him, Ola," remonstrated Mrs. Agger.

"We'll hear. But he ain't comin' back," Ola replied. There was dreary finality in her voice.

THE next day was Saturday. There was no news of Mr. Lenn. With a set look in her eyes, Ola went mechanically about her usual duties. She was waiting; waiting—for what? She did not know, but she was waiting. One thing she knew—there would never be that listening look in Mr. Lenn's eyes again. He had heard and answered the voice. And she knew, too, that he was lying somewhere—very still—there were rocks all about. But where? She did not know.

She recalled Jodson's visits to the house. Mr. Lenn had met him in town; he had told Ola about it—how Jodson had seemed a worthy fellow, in trouble, all his bit of money tied up in a bank which had closed its doors, and Mr. Lenn had lent him ten dollars. Ola had not liked the matter.

"Look here, Mr. Lenn," she had said, "bring him out to supper sometime." She wanted to see for herself what manner of man Jodson was. Mr. Lenn had spoken of him as a "friendly, decent kind of lad."

Jodson was no lad. He was a man of forty; broad, husky, with a plausible tongue. But Ola did not like his eyes; he met one's gaze with aggressive frankness.

"Too frankly," said Ola to Mrs. Agger afterward. "Them eyes of Jodson's are just a-sayin' to the world, 'Look at me, how straight I look you in the eye, and see for yourself what a honest man I am.'"

Ola knew they were lying eyes.

Jodson came several times, then to Ola's relief his visits ceased.

"Gone away somewhere, I guess," said old Mr. Lenn, simply. "I haven't seen him lately."

Saturday dragged to a dreary close. In Ola's mind every incident

connected with Jodson passed, over and over, in ceaseless review. And at last she knew why she was waiting.

Though few people knew it, Ola had a nephew on the police force of the near-by town. She seldom saw Jamie Deigham, but between the two there existed a feeling of friendly kinship, and on rare occasions Jamie came out to his aunt's cottage for one of her excellent fish suppers.

Late in the day of that Saturday Ola went to police headquarters seeking Jamie. Deigham was out of town, they informed her; would not be back till late in the night. Then she left a note urging her nephew to come to her house the next morning, as early as he could. There were things she wanted to talk over with him.

That night Mrs. Agger came in late, very tired. Saturday was always a hard day at the hotel. Ola had retired, and an oil lamp burned low in the bedroom which the two women shared.

"Any news?" asked Manda, as she removed the worn shoes from her tired, burning feet.

"Nothin'," answered Ola.

Silently Manda disrobed, and donned her coarse cotton nightgown.

"What you gonter do about it, Ola? What you waitin' for?" she asked querulously.

A pause; then Ola answered in one word, "Jodson."

"*Jodson?* — Humph. — What you think Jodson could tell you?"

Mrs. Agger turned out the lamp, and slumped heavily into her own bed. Soon she slept, while in the other bed Ola lay, wakeful, grieved over what she knew.

The next morning Jamie was there, early, in time for a cup of his aunt's strong coffee. Over the kitchen table the three talked earnestly. Ola said some strange things.

"But Ola," said Mrs. Agger, aghast, "how *can* you know that? They ain't a thing to go on. The old man may not be——"

Jamie Deigham held up a restraining hand. All his life he had heard of Ola's uncanny intuitions. He was impressed, but troubled with doubt.

"You say, Aunt Ola, he is lying somewhere—covered with rocks. But *where?* We can't do anything unless his body is found. No one has even heard he is missing. And this fellow Jodson—you see we've got to have proof of some kind. We don't even know where Jodson is."

"The old man's lying there, under rocks," Ola doggedly insisted, "and *Jodson knows* where it is. You don't have to hunt for Jodson. *He's comin' right here.* I want that you stay here, Jamie, and wait. Jodson ain't far away. And he's comin' here."

Jamie Deigham was uneasy. "Just what is it you want me to do, Aunt Ola? You see I couldn't afford to make a false move. We've got to have——"

Passionately Ola interrupted. "If you make a false move I'll take all the blame. But, Jamie, they ain't gonter be any false move. Just wait. You'll see. Look!" Suddenly she went to the window. "Yonder, Jamie; just turnin' the brow of the hill. That's him!"

She trembled with excitement, and the others, scarcely less moved, hurried to the window. In the distance a man came striding with confident step down the narrow road which led to the beach.

Ola was white and tense. "All I want you to do, Jamie, is just to watch him. You and Manda stay here. Hide yourselves so he can't see you, but *watch* him. Keep your eyes on his face. You'll know whether I've made a mistake. He's a coward, for all his bluster. And if I haven't made a mistake you'll know what to do. Just keep out of sight—and *watch*. I'll set by the front door, as he comes in. You'll see, Jamie. You'll see."

Deigham and Mrs. Agger exchanged furtive glances. The man approaching might not be Jodson,

after all. Was it possible that Ola was just a little—touched?

JODSON swung down the hill with jaunty stride. Reliant. Cocksure. Entirely satisfied with himself.

He had made a neat job of it, thought Jodson. Bumped him off with one shot. A good gunman never wasted bullets. Thrown the gun into the sea. Thrown the body in, too, weighted down with rocks tied up in a gunny-sack. Wouldn't have croaked the old codger at all if he hadn't refused to lend him the two hundred dollars he wanted.

Well, the old guy ought to have known better. Jodson shrugged. Deceitful, too. Going about with a bulging purse that looked like a million dollars, when he had only three hundred.

Well, three hundred was three hundred, and he had it safely cached. Not about him. Oh no! A smart man like Jodson wouldn't make that kind of slip. Merely a bit of loose silver jingled in his pocket. He had managed it cleverly. Oh, he was a smart fellow! Brave as they make 'em, too! He'd take a chance any time.

Not a soul had seen them together. No one even knew the old man was missing—besides those two old fool women at the house, and neither of them had sense enough to be suspicious. They probably thought the old fellow had just gone on to some other place. Only a lodger, anyway. Lodgers come and go. And even if anyone started inquiries for the old man, or found anything, they couldn't connect *him* up with it. He had been out of town for weeks. He had witnesses for that. No one knew he had been back on Friday. Oh no! He had his alibi all ready. So far as anyone knew he had only returned that very morning, and, the day being Sunday, he was going out to pay a little visit to his friend Mr. Lenn.

He was going to be greatly surprized when he heard that Mr. Lenn had been away since Friday. Oh yes, he'd be quite surprized, and sorry to miss Mr. Lenn; then that old fool Mrs. Madin would invite him to dinner, and they'd have fish, and hot muffins, and coffee. Fine!

Jodson had carefully worked out his alibi to the smallest detail. Only one thing he had not taken into account—Ola Madin's sixth sense. He had never even heard of a sixth sense, and if he had heard he wouldn't have known what it meant.

How little we know, after all, of those intangible forces in the invisible world lying right around us! How little we know what lies just around the corner! How little Jodson knew—clever Jodson!—as he strode whistling blithely, straight to his doom!

Up to the doorstep. Off with his cap. The door was open, and Ola sat quietly reading in the front room.

"Good mornin', Mrs. Madin," Jodson cheerfully greeted her.

"Mornin', Mr. Jodson. Fine day, ain't it?" Ola was unusually affable. "Have a seat."

Jodson complied, drawing up a chair unconcernedly. "I been away quite a spell. . . . How's Mr. Lenn? Can I see him awhile?"

"Why, yes. Sure," returned Ola promptly. "Walk right upstairs. Mr. Lenn's just gone up to his room. He come in only a minute or two ahead of you."

Jodson's beaming face suddenly froze. He stared at Ola, stammering, "Er—what—what was it you said, Mrs. Madin?"

Ola pretended not to notice. "I said he was upstairs, Mr. Jodson. He went out somewhere Friday, and hadn't been back. So when he come in just now, I was real glad to see him back again. I called out to him, but he didn't stop to say nothin'; just hurried right on up to his room. Guess he wanted to wash up before dinner. Didn't you see him as you come down the path? He wasn't

more'n fifty feet ahead of you. He'll be real glad to see you, Mr. Jodson; just go right on up."

But Mr. Jodson didn't go upstairs. He sat as if rooted to his chair, staring at Ola, his face ghastly white.

"Lor', Mr. Jodson, you look real pale! Ain't sick, are you?" said Ola with sudden concern. "If you don't feel like goin' up, I'll call him. . . . But never mind. Here he comes now. Must of heard us talkin'."

With superb naturalness she arose and drew forward a third chair, her eyes, the while, traveling down the stairway as if following someone slowly advancing.

"Well! I'm glad you are back, Mr. Lenn. We was about to get uneasy. Here's Mr. Jodson to see you."

Like stone sat Jodson. Staring. From the first there had been on his face no trace of natural surprize or curiosity, but only intense horror. Fear—stark, unmitigated. He shook like a leaf, his great brutal hands knotted together, with the knuckles showing white through the coarse skin.

"Lor' me! I believe you *are* sick," said Ola, innocently.

Where was Jodson, the brave man? —the clever, jaunty man? Was this Jodson? — this shrinking, hulking, trembling creature with fear-dilated eyes, hanging jaw, ghastly face?

He rose with a strangled cry, and started for the door, but Deigham was ahead of him, clapping a heavy hand on his shoulder. Jamie had seen it all, and had sprung like a cat from the kitchen at Jodson's first move.

"Wait a minute," said Jamie with authority. "Let's hear what it's all about."

Jodson pulled away, yelling in panic, "You ain't got a thing on me! —I ain't seen that old man in weeks! —I can prove it."

Ola held his eyes with her burning gaze, pointing her finger at the shrinking wretch. "You see him now, Jodson—right by your side! Rocks can't hold him down. Right by you, Jodson."

Jodson collapsed, cringing toward Deigham; throwing out his arms as if warding off some unseen thing; screaming hoarsely, "Take him away! Take him away! Don't leave me! Oh, for God's sake, don't leave me!"

Nothing more was needed—no witnesses, no evidence. Jodson was his own accuser. Quietly Deigham snapped on the handcuffs, and half led, half dragged his prisoner to headquarters.

That day Jodson confessed everything—all the sickening details of how the unsuspecting old man had been lured to his death. The body was found in the shallow cove which he described, and afterward it was given decent burial.

Ola and Manda placed a wreath of flowers on the lonely grave in the little plot overlooking the sea. Ola had bought the plot with Mr. Lenn's recovered money. "He'd want to be by the sea," she said.

Some time afterward Jamie ventured to ask his aunt a long-deferred question.

"Aunt Ola, did you really *see* Mr. Lenn—that day—coming down the stairs?"

Ola looked at him strangely, as she replied after a pause, "No matter what I did see, or didn't see, Jamie. But you can lay to this: *Jodson saw him.*"

SONNETS of the MIDNIGHT-HOURS

BY DONALD WANDREI

1. *The Hungry Flowers*

The fleshly flowers whispered avidly:
  This being's face is soft, he shall not pass;
  And all the little jeweled blades of grass
Made mutterings that sounded like low glee.
I laughed, though wanly; for it seemed to me
  These glittering swords that shone like broken glass,
  Though singly impotent, might be, in mass,
A savage, indestructible enemy.

So, hesitantly, I put forth my foot
  To see if they would open up a path;
I found my leg become a hellish root,
  And thereupon, as if to vent their wrath,
I saw the hungry flowers toward me crawl,
And on my flesh, their mouths, devouring, fall!

2. *Dream-Horror*

Now they have buried me in this dark pit,
  And all around, the weary corpses lie;
  They know that it will take me years to die,
Although my flesh with many knives is slit.
They would not burn me quickly on their spit;
  How much more exquisite to hear me cry
  With only rotten corpses lying by,
And bloated carrion rats that near me sit!

They left to me my eyes, so I could stare
  Around, and see the comrades that I had;
They left me also rotten corpses there
  To keep me company lest I go mad;
And then they left me, lonely, lying where
  The worms with endless, spoiling flesh are glad.

The STRANGE PEOPLE

BY · MURRAY LEINSTER

"He was hidden from view in a mass of stabbing figures."

The Story Thus Far

CUNNINGHAM and Gray go to the hills of New Hampshire to investigate a settlement of foreigners—a Strange People who have never seen a revolver, who strike from ambush by throwing sharp knives, who use strangely minted gold coins, and who keep aloof from everybody but themselves. Cunningham runs afoul of Vladimir, a sinister person whose brother has been killed by the Strange People because he knew the hideous secret that they have guarded with their lives. Vladimir bribes the sheriff to keep Cunningham and Gray away from the Strangers, and swears that by his knowledge of their terrible secret he will make them kiss the dust under his feet. One of the Strangers, captured by the sheriff's men, kills himself for fear that he may be forced to reveal the secret. Cunningham falls in love with Maria, a girl of the Strange People, and rescues her from Vladimir. He has been warned that Maria can never marry him, lest she might reveal to him the awful secret of who the Strange People are and where they came from; and he is told that he will be put to death if he ever comes into the hills again. But the countryside is roused against the Strange People, and in order to get Maria back to her people and warn the Strangers to keep moving (for the excited farmers will shoot them down like dogs), he returns to them. Maria's father asks him, despairingly, "Why did you come back? You knew what we would have to do. Why did you come back?" In the meantime Gray has ordered help by airplane to stem the fanaticism of the farmers before the Strange People are massacred.

15

THE sun sank thunderously behind the mountain-range and tinted the tips of all the peaks with gold. Little fleecy clouds floated overhead in contented indolence. The wind of the heights was still. The pine-clad hills seemed very soft and restful as the shadows deepened on the eastern slopes, and contrasted strangely with the still-bright golden fields of the valleys yet unshadowed by the mountains.

Stephan held out a weary hand,

pointing. A sullen column of smoke rose from a point far distant. He pointed again, where a thin wisp of vapor grew steadily thicker and denser.

"Our houses," he said bitterly. "They are being burned. Vladimir has spoken, and we die."

Cunningham clenched his fists as the sullen gray clouds rose slowly upward in the still air. Once he saw figures moving about the base of the smoke. Once he thought he heard yelling.

"I don't think he's told your secret," he said after an instant. "That's the mob. Gray promised that help would come. He said it was coming by airplane. And Vladimir——"

He told Stephan swiftly what Vladimir had said to the sheriff: that the Strangers were to be surrounded by the mob, and that then he would speak to them; that they would submit, and that some would go away in chains to be hung for the murder of his brother, and that he would take the others away with him forever; that they would follow when he spoke to them and obey him in all things.

Stephan's eyes flashed fire for a second.

"'Is life so sweet or peace so dear,'" he quoted bitterly, "'as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?'" He stopped short. "No," he said quietly. "We will not obey him. No!"

Cunningham felt again that curious impotent bafflement. Stephan had just quoted Patrick Henry's speech to the House of Burgesses, the famous "Give me liberty or give me death" speech. And Stephan had never seen a revolver until Cunningham showed him one, nor a shotgun save at a distance and in the hands of the farmers about him. None of the Strange People were better informed. Keeping passionately to themselves, it was possible that they would never have seen a pistol if they were ignorant of them before they came mysteriously to these hills. Revolvers are not common in country places, nor are those possessed displayed.

"You see," said Stephan with a faint smile, "how I was able to spare you for a time. It is likely that we will all soon be dead. And then it does not matter if you know our secret or not."

"Tell me now," begged Cunningham. "It will make no difference to you, and it may mean everything——"

Stephan smiled slowly at Maria, who was clinging to Cunningham's arm as if she feared that at any instant he might be torn away.

"You say you do not know," he said with a wretched attempt at lightness. "Maria loves you. You would despise her if you knew. Let her be happy as long as may be." He paused and surveyed the hillside with keen eyes, then added: "We trust you. We might have killed many of that mob already. They were careless. But we have fled before them. We will keep from killing them as long as we can, because you have asked it."

"Gray will be here!" said Cunningham passionately. "He has promised! Help will come!"

Stephan shrugged his shoulders and gave a low-voiced order in the unknown tongue which the Strangers spoke among themselves.

"Help," he said in a moment more, and smiled very wearily indeed. "The soldiers will come, no doubt. And then we die indeed. We move now, my son."

Half a dozen Strangers hovered near Cunningham. They were guards, to prevent his escape at any cost. That they would kill him to keep him from getting away there was no doubt. That they hated him was totally improbable. The faces of all the Strangers wore a settled,

fatalistic look. Every one was now clad in the barbaric costume they had worn about the fires the night before, as if they had abandoned all hope of pretending longer that they were of the same sort as the inhabitants of the valleys.

CUNNINGHAM followed as the Strangers moved on. Little bands of them were constantly appearing unexpectedly from the woods and joining the main body. There were quite two hundred in all when they passed over a hill-crest and settled themselves in the valley beyond.

The mob had appeared from Bendale. On horse-back, in motor-cars and in wagons drawn by teams, what seemed to be the whole population had come raging out to Coulters. The farmers of the valley had put their women-folk together and come armed with weapons, from shotguns to pitchforks. And they had surged into the hills in quest of the Strange People. All had forgotten that the only thing genuinely proved against the Strangers was the death of Valdimir's brother. All were hysterically convinced that the Strangers made a practise of kidnaping children and sacrificing adults in devilish orgies by their fires.

The belief was not unparalleled. To be peculiar is to invite suspicion. The Strangers were peculiar. Suspicion is always based on fear. What fear is more terrible than that of harm to one's children? Every unknown man or race of men has been accused of the one crime. Gipsies are not yet freed of the suspicion of kidnaping. A lurking tramp or wanderer is instantly and invariably suspected of intent to commit the same offense.

Was it odd, then, that the secretive folk of the hills had been classed as doubtful? The mysterious ceremony of the fires, as described by the ignorant and frightened constables, was capable of any interpretation. What had been doubts and vague surmises became certainties when coupled with the ceremony which was meaningless unless sinister.

Now the Strangers had withdrawn from the first of the mountain-slopes. They abandoned their homes to the mob without a struggle. The houses went up in flames. The Strangers had seen the columns of smoke rising to the sky.

Men and women wore a look of settled calm. A mob that vastly outnumbered them, and was vastly better armed, was seeking them in raging madness. They waited to die. Some of the younger men chafed at the delay in fighting. With their throwing-knives they might have picked off many of their persecutors, but Stephan had forbidden it.

They waited. Darkness fell. Through the stillness of early night came the sound of a shot, then another and another. Wild yells broke loose below.

After a long time a runner came panting to the bivouac. He had bound the embroidered sash that was part of his costume about his arm, but it was stained—a dark purple in the moonlight.

Stephan ordered another move. Uncomplainingly the Strangers rose and plodded farther into the hills. The children were weary. Fretful little cries rose from the long line. Women hushed them gently. There was little talk. Just a long line of barbarously clad people plodding with bowed heads onward, onward, onward, while a shouting, raving mob raged through the woods in quest of them.

Cunningham went with them. He had no choice, but it is doubtful if he would have done otherwise had he been able to.

Again the weary people settled for a little rest. Yells sounded faintly, far to the right. A red glow began

and grew larger and became a house burning with a crackling noise in the wilderness. Cunningham saw an old man rise on one elbow and peer at the flames. His face was apathetic. Then he lay down again.

"That was my house," he said quietly to the man nearest him, and was silent.

Again came runners, panting. One man was sobbing in rage and humiliation, begging leave to plunge into the mob and die fighting—alone, if need be.

Stephan refused him gently.

"I think we die," he said grimly, "but he"—Stephan pointed at Cunningham—"has promised that help will come. I do not believe it, but we can miss no chance. We have women with us, and children. We must hold ourselves for them. While the least chance remains, we must live."

Once more came the order to move. And once more the weary march began. It had no object and it had no hope. But beneath the full moon the Strangers plodded on and on, until the baying of dogs set up behind them.

"They've sent down in the valley and got dogs!" raged Cunningham in a blend of fury and sick horror.

Stephan stroked his chin and gazed at Cunningham.

"What now, my son?" he asked.

Cunningham shook his head in despair.

"This is the end," said Stephan quietly. "I think—I think we may let you go on alone, if you wish. You may escape."

"Maria?" demanded Cunningham, very white. He would feel like a coward and a scoundrel if he deserted these people, but if he could save Maria he would do it.

"No," said Stephan. "She is my daughter and I would save her life. But if our secret is known it is best that she die quickly with the rest."

Cunningham groaned and clenched his fists.

"I stay," he said harshly. "And —I fight with you!"

Sunrise broke upon the Strangers huddled high up on a bare and windswept peak. Its first cold rays aroused them. Gradually it warmed them. And it showed them clearly to a ring of still-raging men who were made savage by the ruin they had wrought during the night. From fifty places in the hills thin columns of smoke still rose wanly to the sky, from as many heaps of ashes that had been the Strangers' homes.

And shots began to be fired from the besiegers of the Strange People. Then Vladimir rode forward on a white horse and shouted to them in that unknown language.

16

CUNNINGHAM could not understand the speech of Vladimir, nor the replies that Stephan made. Only, once Maria clung to his arm in an access of hope.

"He has not spoken!" she whispered. "He is threatening now to tell them who we are——"

Then Vladimir was shouting promises, to judge by his tone. A moment later his voice was stern.

Maria sobbed suddenly. A growl went up from the Strangers, running all about among the huddled figures.

Far away over the hills a low-toned buzzing set up. It strengthened and grew louder. A black dot hung between earth and sky. It grew larger. A second black dot appeared; a third. Wings could be seen upon the first of the airplanes. More and more appeared until there were six in all, flying in formation and winging their way steadily toward the hills.

They darted back and forth, searching. Cunningham shouted joyously.

"There they are!" he yelled. "Tell Vladimir to go to hell, Stephan! We've got help with us now!"

Vladimir had heard the sound of the engines and stared upward. Then foam appeared upon his lips and he shrieked with rage.

"There will be soldiers upon those things?" asked Stephan quietly. The Strangers were gazing up at the swooping aircraft that quartered the hills like monster hawks, in quest of the Strangers and their enemies.

"Surely," Cunningham told him joyously. "They'll carry five men apiece, with the pilots."

Stephan rose and stepped forward, where he shouted in a stentorian voice to Vladimir. Maria gasped in terror and clung close to Cunningham.

"He is—he is going to do as Vladimir says!" she cried. "Do not let him do it! Oh, do not——"

Stephan turned and spoke in a low tone in the unknown tongue of the Strangers. And where there had been rebellion among the defiant folk on the peak before he spoke, afterward there were grim smiles. Men's hands loosened the knives in their belts.

Stephan shouted again in apparent panic, pointing up to the flying things that circled suddenly above them. And Vladimir's face contorted in a grin of direst cruelty. He called over his shoulder and rode forward until he was just out of throwing-knife range. Then he shouted once more.

At Stephan's low-toned order a cloud of knives went licking through the air and fell at his horse's feet. And Vladimir grinned savagely and rode up, quite up, among the Strange People.

They cowered as he drew close to them. They crawled upon the ground as he stared savagely about him. They shook in seeming terror as he snarled a phrase or two at them. Cunningham gripped his revolver, his eyes blazing amid all his bewilderment. He had never seen such beastly cruelty upon the face of any living man. Maria clung close to him, shaking in unearthly terror.

Vladimir rode his horse toward a cowering group. They rolled away, gasping in apparent horror, as the horse was upon them. Not one lifted a finger to defend himself. They seemed stricken with utter, craven terror. They crawled abjectly upon the ground before him.

Vladimir came upon the bullet-headed servant he had sent to kill Cunningham. The man fawned up at his master, bound hand and foot as he was. Vladimir gazed at him sardonically and spoke in a purring tone. Then he deliberately shot the man dead.

The Strange People cringed. Then Vladimir saw Cunningham. He rode over and stared down with cold, beastly eyes.

"Ah, my friend," he purred. "You know the secret of my folk, you say. Perhaps you lie, but it does not matter. You saw the end of my servant, did you not? That was for failing to kill you as I ordered. Do you remember that after that you struck me?"

Cunningham's fingers itched on trigger.

"I do," he said curtly. "You'd better run away, Vladimir. My friend Gray has some unbribed officers in those planes that are going to land in a minute or so."

Vladimir laughed.

"What difference?" he asked amusedly. "My people are cowed, now. They will swear to anything I choose to tell them. All that I need to do is hand over some of them to be hanged. One or two will go for killing my servant. They will confess to whatever I say. And I will take the others away with me."

"You're sure?" asked Cunningham grimly. "Quite sure?"

"But certainly," Vladimir laughed again. "They are afraid I will tell who they are. But you—— Time is short." He glanced at Stephan and his voice rasped. "Take away his weapons!"

Stephan approached Cunningham, cowering from the menace of Vladimir's eyes. He seemed to be in the ultimate of terror, but as he drew near to Cunningham, and Vladimir could not see his face, he smiled grimly. There was no terror on his face then. He made a reassuring gesture.

"Take it!" rasped Vladimir harshly. "Disarm him!"

Stephan's lips moved but Cunningham could not quite understand what he wished to convey. But he had two revolvers and he thrust one into Stephan's hand and drew and jerked the other behind him while Stephan's body covered the movement.

"Ah," purred Vladimir as Stephan drew back and handed over the weapon. "You see it is necessary to kill you, Cunningham. My folk will take the blame for it. I shall probably let Stephan hang for your murder. They need a lesson, you understand. But I will be merciful. A bullet through the heart——"

He raised Cunningham's own revolver, but he never fired it. As his arm lifted, Cunningham's own weapon came around. But Cunningham did not fire either. There was a panted ejaculation and a dozen Strangers seemed to spring from the earth. With the savagery and directness of so many panthers they leaped upon Vladimir. He was hidden from view in a mass of savagely stabbing figures who clung to him in a grim silence. Vladimir screamed just once, and his revolver went off with a deafening explosion. One of the Strangers rolled to the ground, coughing, while he grinned in spite of his agony.

And then Vladimir fell with a crash to the ground and lay still.

There was a shout from the Strangers. Men yelled and the younger ones darted out to where their knives had been tossed before Vladimir. They came racing back with armfuls of the shining blades. They distributed them swiftly, grinning as they did so.

And in less than two minutes from the time Vladimir had ridden up to the peak where the Strangers lay barricaded, he had died and the Strangers were again lying in wait for the attack that they were sure would result in their annihilation.

But the great airplanes came coasting down heavily. Their motors shut off one by one and they zoomed to lose speed and pancaked with sudden awkwardness to the earth. This was no ideal landing-place. Three of them alighted safely. One was tilted sidewise by a sudden gust of wing and crumpled up a wing against a tree. Two others crashed their landing-gear on boulders on the rocky hillside.

Then Gray leaped out of the first to land, shouting frantically to the besiegers to fire no more. Men jumped from the others and spread themselves about the peak. They were alert grim figures with rifles which they handled with familiar ease. And Gray came running up to the embattled Strangers, his hands high above his head, and shouting that he was a friend.

17

"PLANES had to land at the Junction last night," said Gray curtly to Cunningham. "Didn't get here until sunset and couldn't land in unfamiliar territory after dark, particularly this kind of territory. I went on and met them last night. We took off at sunrise. What happened? Any fighting?"

"Several of us shot," said Cunningham grimly. "Nobody killed that I know of. But every house in the hills has been looted and burnt."

"Fools!" snapped Gray. "But they'd do that.—What's that?"

He was staring at a sprawled heap on the ground.

"That was Vladimir," said Cunningham calmly. "He'd just shot his servant for failing to kill me, and was shooting me down in cold blood when the Strangers jumped him. You don't get a murder case out of this, Gray. They killed him to save my life."

"Glad of it," said Gray restlessly. "Now——"

"By the badge you've stuck on your coat," said Cunningham grimly, "you're a detective of some sort. And I suppose those chaps who came in the planes are Federal men. What do you want with the Strangers, Gray?"

Gray stirred uneasily. Then he faced Cunningham squarely.

"I'm in the immigration service," he said flatly. "These people are aliens, smuggled in. You can guess the rest of it yourself."

"I can't," said Cunningham savagely. "There's more to it than that, and they won't tell me; not even Maria."

Stephan spoke quietly. "Do you know who and what we are?"

"I do," said Gray curtly. "You're——"

Stephan stopped him with an upraised palm. His face was the color of ashes.

"Then you know," he said tonelessly, "why we prefer to die here. And since our young friend will not leave us of his own will, my young men will carry him, bound——"

"Try it," said Cunningham briefly. "If there's fighting, I fight. If Maria dies, I die. That's all."

He brought his remaining weapon into view and held it grimly.

Gray stared from one to the other. He shrugged his shoulders almost up to his ears and waved his hands helplessly. And then he said quickly, "Since I know, and the soldiers know, there's no harm in telling Cunningham."

Maria, her lips bloodless, whispered, "Tell him. It is best."

But it was to Gray that Stephan turned. His back was toward Cunningham as he made a gesture for Gray's benefit alone. Cunningham could not see, but it seemed as if Stephan had thrust up the wide sleeve of his embroidered jacket. And Gray licked his lips and said, "Oh, my God!"

"I tell you my own story," said Stephan quietly. "The others are much the same. Twenty years ago I was the son of a village headman in Daghestan, which is in southern Russia. And there came upon me suddenly this—this thing which has made me one of the Strangers."

Gray, shuddering, nodded. Cunningham raised his head.

"What thing?" he demanded.

"My own people would have stoned me when they knew," said Stephan grimly. "My own father would have killed me. And I was a fool then. I desired still to live. I had heard whispers of this America, in which the son of the Governor of Daghestan had found a mine of gold so rich that he must work it secretly. It lay in a hidden valley, unknown to other men, and it was worked by—Strangers, who were safe in that one small valley so long as they served the lord Vladimir, while anywhere else in the world all men would kill them."

"Why?" demanded Cunningham fiercely.

Stephan did not answer directly.

"I went down from the mountains that I loved, away from all my kin, and I went to the Governor of Daghestan and said that I wished to work in the mine of his son. And he sent me to a place, closely guard-

ed, where there were others who were—as I was. And a long time later a boat came, and it took us many days upon the sea, and landed us secretly by night, and we traveled secretly, hiding, for many more days. And we came to the hidden valley ruled by the lord Vladimir and found two hundred other Strangers turned to slaves and working in the gold-mine he had discovered. They told us we would have done better to be stoned in our own villages than to come. We were driven to work with whips. If we rebelled we were shot down by the guards, who carried guns."

Gray moved suddenly.

"This was twenty years ago?" he demanded. "And you were kept a prisoner in that valley all that time, by guards with guns?"

"All of us," said Stephan quietly. He thrust with his foot at the body of Vladimir, lying in the dust before him. "That was our master. He had us taught the English language so that if other people came upon the valley we would seem to be of this nation. Three times—no, four times—wandering men came into the valley. None of them ever left it. They were killed by the guards. . . ."

Gray stirred, his eyes moving fascinatedly from one to another of the Strange People.

"But we had been free men, once," said Stephan proudly. "We wept at first because we were—Strangers. Then we grew ready to fight because we were men. Many times, in those twenty years, we planned revolt. There were two or three Strangers among us who were from this nation. One of them became my wife and the mother of Maria. She had been a teacher in the schools, and she taught us much. But Vladimir seemed to hear our secret thoughts. Every time he forestalled our plans and punished us horribly for daring to think of revolt. Men said that he stretched threads of metal to our houses and that our words traveled to him along those threads, so that he knew always what we planned."

"Telephones," said Gray, fascinated, "but in the walls. Of course he could listen in."

"So at last we made our plans in the woods of the valley." Stephan spread out his hands. "We stole of the gold we dug. We gave it to five of our number, and they fled away. They bought horses and food—many horses and much food. They found a hiding-place for us. And while they were doing that, Vladimir was torturing us to learn where they had gone and why. But though four men and a woman died, they did not tell. And suddenly, in a night, we Strangers who were slaves of Vladimir, we fled from the valley. We killed the guards with our knives and vanished, hiding in the secret place the first five men had found. It was secret and secure. And then——"

Stephan hesitated.

"My wife, who was of this nation, had been born in these hills here. She told us of these hills as of Paradise. So we sent again a few of our number here. With the gold we had brought away, we bought ground. Then, a little by a little, all of us came. We kept far from other people. We did them no harm. Now they want to kill us, because Vladimir doubtless told them before he died that we were lepers, and because we are lepers, we must die."

He turned grimly to Cunningham and bared his forearm. And the skin of that forearm was silvery.

Cunningham's tongue would not move. Gray shivered.

"I'll—I'll admit," he said shakenly, "I didn't bargain for this. Good God!" He stared at the somber-faced Strangers with a queer terror. Then he shook himself suddenly. "But look here——!"

Cunningham found himself speaking hoarsely. "Not Maria!" he gasped. "Not Maria!"

Stephan's face, the color of ashes, had only compassion upon it as he watched Cunningham.

"Wait a bit," cried Gray. "Wait a bit! Stephan! That—that thing on your arm. It comes first on the elbows and knees, where the clothing rubs! Redness first, then this?"

"That is it," said Stephan quietly. "We have seen our children appear so. We have tried—ah, how we have tried!—to keep them from being Strangers too. But it is in the blood. Maria has showed it not even yet. But in time to come——"

"Nobody," panted Gray excitedly, "ever got it over fifty years of age!"

"Those who have come to us," said Stephan, "have always been young."

Gray struck his hands together.

"But it shouldn't be that way!" he cried. "It should take all ages. It should show on the face and hands! Not one of you shows it on the face or hands. There should be a dark band across the forehead. The fingertips should be silver, and the fingers should be twisted and bent. . . . Have you ever seen a doctor?"

Stephan smiled grimly. "That"—he pointed again to Vladimir's body—"when that was our master, he had a doctor to keep us alive. And there was never any doubt."

"I was at Ellis Island," said Gray excitedly. "I know what I'm talking——"

"It is finished," said Stephan grimly. "We die. Go and send your soldiers or your people to kill us."

"Cunningham, make him listen——"

"Go on, Gray," said Cunningham hoarsely. His face was ashen. "They'd only put us in some—some horrible colony somewhere. I—I don't want to live after this. If they want to die, let them. I'm going to stay and—and get killed with them, if I can."

"Idiot!" snapped Gray. "I've been telling you for half an hour that the symptoms are all wrong. And I was on Ellis Island and I know what they have got! And I know how they got it. Why, you idiot, don't you see that Vladimir was getting his father to send him slaves to work that damned mine? That the only way they could be kept as slaves would be to make them think they'd be killed if anybody else knew what he knew about them? They didn't get that thing naturally. They were deliberately inoculated with *psoriasis,* a sub-tropical skin affection that looks enough like leprosy to give anybody a start, but doesn't make a person unfit to work! These poor devils thought they were lepers, and they had a skin affection that is about as serious as dandruff! Creosote ointment or arsenic taken internally will cure it in ten days, and without one of those two things it lasts for years. Cooped up as they were, they reinfected each other. Believing themselves pariahs, they were afraid to run away from Vladimir until they had to. And he was trying to bluff them back to work in his mine. Don't you see, you idiot? Don't you see? It was a trick to get workers for his mine, workers who wouldn't dare be disloyal to him. And when they had run away, why, he had to get them back or they might find out themselves what he'd done and tell where his mine was and about all the crimes he's committed these twenty years back. Don't you see, Cunningham, don't you see?"

He turned to Stephan, who was staring at him incredulously.

"If you don't think I'm telling the truth," he snapped, "I'll go and kiss every pretty girl in camp to prove it! You've been here twenty years. I can't touch you. I can't deport

you. And I'm mighty glad of it! As for killing Vladimir and his brother, I'm going to do my best to get you medals for the performance. I'm going to set my men on these fool farmers and chase 'em home. We'll sue them for the houses they've burnt. We'll put that sheriff in jail. We'll—we'll—— Cunningham, you lucky son-of-a-gun, I'm going to be best man and kiss the bride!"

But Cunningham was already preceding him in that occupation.

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It was a very, very long time later. Cunningham was sitting peacefully upon the veranda of a house among tall mountains. His eyes roved the length of a valley that was closed in at the farther end by precipitous cliffs. There were small, contented sounds from the house behind him.

A motor-car rolled up a smooth, graded roadway. A man by the road saw the occupant of the car and shouted a greeting. Cunningham sprang to his feet and ran down to meet it.

Gray tumbled out of the car and gripped Cunningham's hand.

"I brought my fishing-rods," he announced exuberantly. "Where's that stream you were writing about?"

"Find it in the morning," said Cunningham happily. "How d'you like our valley?"

Gray came up the steps and stared out at the empty space below him. There were tall buildings down in the valley floor—great concrete buildings, with a tall shaft-house where motors whirred and an engine puffed.

"There ain't any such place!" announced Gray firmly. "I'm dreaming it! I found a concrete road leading here. I passed half a dozen motor-trucks on the way. And one scoundrel waved at me from a steering-wheel and I'll swear he's the chap that had a knife in the small of my back once, ready to stick it in."

"Quite likely," admitted Cunningham, grinning. "He is quite glad, now, that he did not stick it in. I've spread the news that you were the one who proved their title to the valley, through twenty years' occupation."

Gray squirmed, then grinned.

"Might be useful," he admitted, "to be popular here, in case there are any more fire-ceremonies going on."

Cunningham's face was serious for a moment.

"They were desperate, then," he said. "They'd tried the Christian God and things still looked black. So they called upon some ancient deities that their forefathers had worshiped. . . . You mustn't blame them, Gray."

"I don't." Gray grinned. "But I do want to study their dialect, Cunningham."

"Go ahead. It's disappearing. We're going in for politics, and boy scouts, and radios. We are a long way from a railroad, but our mine has built a road to it, and we have a motor-truck line that's as good as a trolley any day. We're highly civilized now, Gray."

He opened the door into the house. And there was Maria to smile and give Gray her hand.

"Your husband," said Gray, "has been boasting outrageously about what's happened in the valley since you people came back."

"He did it all," said Maria proudly. "Nobody does anything, ever, without asking him."

Gray chuckled and lifted an eyebrow at Cunningham.

"You haven't seen the prize exhibit yet," said Cunningham hastily. "Chief!"

There was a movement and Stephan came up a flight of steps that led outside. There was a tiny figure balanced on his shoulders. Stephan twinkled as he saw Gray, and he set his burden on the ground.

"I found him," he announced proudly, "going down the hillside with his air-rifle. He was going to hunt bears. That is a grandson!"

Gray stooped and beckoned. The small figure came shyly forward.

"Son," said Gray gravely, "don't you waste your time on small game like bears. Wait until you grow up a bit, and see a picture of a pretty girl in a magazine, and you find out where she is. And then—why, then you can start out on the route to romance and adventure."

[THE END]

A Short Spider-Story

The Black Madonna

By A. W. WYVILLE

HOUSES with shuttered windows, houses with a hangdog air, going to ruin. Houses about which strange tales are told. Tales of strange happenings. Such will always fire the imaginative. Of such a house I tell.

It was situated on the outskirts of a small village, a village famed in the Revolutionary War. I lingered and gathered its history, bit by bit. A story that will draw smiles from the unbelieving, yet cause thoughtful men to pause, as I paused, pondering over the strange ways in which fate sometimes evens scores.

The house had been vacant several years. Shunned by the villagers. They did not claim that it was haunted. Its gruesome story forbade tenants.

The last occupants had been two brothers. One a tall, hawk-nosed, surly character, the younger a pleasant chap with dark brown eyes and a small mustache. Slight of build. Chemists they were; brilliant chemists, we heard. They hired no one, doing their own cooking and general work. Partitions had been torn out and an expensive laboratory installed. Bottles upon bottles. Retorts and electric furnaces of the most elaborate description. Word went around that they were working on a great chemical problem, the solution of which would revolutionize a major industry.

Although the elder brother was seldom seen on the village streets, the younger would often pass through on his way to the city, driving an expensive car. Sometimes he would stop and talk. He talked on many subjects but never of his work. All such questions he skilfully parried. While his main interests were centered on his work, he also spent some time on a hobby, zoology. He would often be seen in the fields on

a summer day, equipped with a long-handled net. A strange combination of interests.

Lights glowed in their house until far into the night. A tall figure could be seen moving behind the shades. Not long after the brothers had moved in, there came to the village one night the sound of a muffled explosion. Lurid flames shot from the house of mystery. The village fire department soon had the flames under control, however. To do so they had been obliged to enter the laboratory, from whence the explosion took place. What they saw was the talk of the town, although the occupants had got them out as soon as they could, seeming to fear that they would see too much. Some people wondered if perhaps they were not counterfeiters.

THE brothers repaired the damage and the talk died down. The next happening of interest came from a different quarter.

It came in a bunch of bananas. The local grocer found it. A hairy spider, with a bright red spot on its back. It was then the middle of winter and the repulsive thing was in a torpid state from the cold. Instead of killing it, the grocer, perhaps with an eye for advertising, placed it in a small wire cage with a lighted electric lamp for warmth.

He had not misjudged its potential attraction qualities. Revived by the warmth, it was soon crawling around its cage seeking an opening. The whole town had seen it and speculated about it, when it was drawn to the attention of the young chemist, he being "interested in bugs and sich," as they put it.

One look at the spider, and the young man drew in his breath sharply.

"A Black Madonna," he whispered.

Of course that meant nothing to the villagers. He explained. It seems that the Black Madonna is the most poisonous spider known to science. Death almost invariably follows its bite.

This information put the grocer into a cold sweat, for he remembered how free he had been in handling it. He was for immediately destroying it. The young chemist offered to buy it, alive. The grocer dubiously assented. After all, it was clear profit. We never saw it again.

Spring came in cold, severe snowstorms following on one another's heels. The two brothers were more or less isolated. Late wayfarers reported that the lights burned as brightly as ever in the house.

From this point my story will have to be partly guesswork and deductions from what came to light later.

UPON arriving at the house with his prisoner, the young man took it to his room to examine at his leisure. Kept it warm and fed it gnats. It seemed to thrive. However, he did not let it interfere with his research work.

The two brothers were working independently toward the same goal. The elder worked at night, while his brother utilized the daylight hours. Each kept his progress to himself. An odd arrangement.

The younger man won. When his brother rose from his bed one afternoon, having worked through the night, he found the other with shining eyes. Yes, it had been by accident. Just stumbled on it. Meant international fame!

Just stumbled on it! Just by accident! The words repeated themselves in the elder brother's brain. He almost hated his kinsman. All his work for nothing. More than life itself he craved the fame that would come with success.

Rappaccini's Daughter

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

A YOUNG man, named Giovanni Guasconti, came, very long ago, from the more southern region of Italy, to pursue his studies at the University of Padua. Giovanni, who had but a scanty supply of gold ducats in his pocket, took lodgings in a high and gloomy chamber of an old edifice which looked not unworthy to have been the palace of a Paduan noble, and which, in fact, exhibited over its entrance the armorial bearings of a family long since extinct. The young stranger, who was not unstudied in the great poem of his country, recollected that one of the ancestors of this family, and perhaps an occupant of this very mansion, had been pictured by Dante as a partaker of the immortal agonies of his Inferno. These reminiscences and associations, together with the tendency to heartbreak natural to a young man for the first time out of his native sphere, caused Giovanni to sigh heavily as he looked around the desolate and ill-furnished apartment.

"Holy Virgin, signor!" cried old Dame Lisabetta, who, won by the youth's remarkable beauty of person, was kindly endeavoring to give the chamber a habitable air, "what a sigh was that to come out of a young man's heart! Do you find this old mansion gloomy? For the love of Heaven, then, put your head out of the window, and you will see as bright sunshine as you have left in Naples."

Guasconti mechanically did as the old woman advised, but could not quite agree with her that the Paduan sunshine was as cheerful as that of southern Italy. Such as it was, however, it fell upon a garden beneath the window and expended its fostering influences on a variety of plants, which seemed to have been cultivated with exceeding care.

"Does this garden belong to the house?" asked Giovanni.

"Heaven forbid, signor, unless it were fruitful of better pot herbs than any that grow there now," answered old Lisabetta. "No; that garden is cultivated by the own hands of Signor Giacomo Rappaccini, the famous doctor, who, I warrant him, has been heard of as far as Naples. It is said that he distils these plants into medicines that are as potent as a charm. Oftentimes you may see the signor doctor at work, and perchance the signora, his daughter, too, gathering the strange flowers that grow in the garden."

The old woman had now done what she could for the aspect of the chamber; and, commending the young man

to the protection of the saints, took her departure.

Giovanni still found no better occupation than to look down into the garden beneath his window. From its appearance, he judged it to be one of those botanic gardens which were of earlier date in Padua than elsewhere in Italy or in the world. Or, not improbably, it might once have been the pleasure-place of an opulent family; for there was the ruin of a marble fountain in the center, sculptured with rare art, but so wofully shattered that it was impossible to trace the original design from the chaos of remaining fragments. The water, however, continued to gush and sparkle into the sunbeams as cheerfully as ever. A little gurgling sound ascended to the young man's window and made him feel as if the fountain were an immortal spirit, that sung its song unceasingly and without heeding the vicissitudes around it, while one century imbodied it in marble and another scattered the perishable garniture on the soil. All about the pool into which the water subsided grew various plants, that seemed to require a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves, and, in some instances, flowers gorgeously magnificent. There was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the luster and richness of a gem; and the whole together made a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine. Every portion of the soil was peopled with plants and herbs, which, if less beautiful, still bore tokens of assiduous care, as if all had their individual virtues, known to the scientific mind that fostered them. Some were placed in urns, rich with old carving, and others in common garden pots; some crept serpent-like along the ground or climbed on high, using whatever means of ascent was offered them. One plant had wreathed itself around a statue of Vertumnus, which was thus quite veiled and shrouded in a drapery of hanging foliage, so happily arranged that it might have served a sculptor for a study.

While Giovanni stood at the window he heard a rustling behind a screen of leaves, and became aware that a person was at work in the garden. His figure soon emerged into view, and showed itself to be that of no common laborer, but a tall, emaciated, sallow, and sickly-looking man, dressed in a scholar's garb of black. He was beyond the middle term of life, with gray hair, a thin, gray beard, and a face singularly marked with intellect and cultivation, but which could never, even in his more youthful days, have expressed much warmth of heart.

Nothing could exceed the intentness with which this scientific gardener examined every shrub which grew in his path: it seemed as if he was looking into their inmost nature, making observations in regard to their creative essence, and discovering why one leaf grew in this shape and another in that, and wherefore such and such flowers differed among themselves in hue and perfume. Nevertheless, in spite of this deep intelligence on his part, there was no approach to intimacy between himself and these vegetable existences. On the contrary, he avoided their actual touch or the direct inhaling of their odors with a caution that impressed Giovanni most disagreeably; for the man's demeanor was that of one walking among malignant influences, such as savage beasts, or deadly snakes, or evil spirits, which, should he allow them one moment of license, would wreak upon him some terrible fatality. It was strangely frightful to the young man's imagination to see this air of insecurity in a person cultivating a garden, that most simple and innocent of human toils, and which

had been alike the joy and labor of the unfallen parents of the race. Was this garden, then, the Eden of the present world? And this man, with such a perception of harm in what his own hands caused to grow,—was he the Adam?

The distrustful gardener, while plucking away the dead leaves or pruning the too luxuriant growth of the shrubs, defended his hands with a pair of thick gloves. Nor were these his only armor. When, in his walk through the garden, he came to the magnificent plant that hung its purple gems beside the marble fountain, he placed a kind of mask over his mouth and nostrils, as if all this beauty did but conceal a deadlier malice; but, finding his task still too dangerous, he drew back, removed the mask, and called loudly, but in the infirm voice of a person affected with inward disease,—

"Beatrice! Beatrice!"

"Here am I, my father. What would you?" cried a rich and youthful voice from a window of the opposite house—a voice as rich as a tropical sunset, and which made Giovanni, though he knew not why, think of deep hues of purple or crimson and of perfumes heavily delectable. "Are you in the garden?"

"Yes, Beatrice," answered the gardener; "and I need your help."

Soon there emerged from under a sculptured portal the figure of a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy; all of which attributes were bound down and compressed, as it were, and girdled tensely, in their luxuriance, by her virgin zone. Yet Giovanni's fancy must have grown morbid while he looked down into the garden; for the impression which the fair stranger made upon him was as if here were another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them, but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask. As Beatrice came down the garden path, it was observable that she handled and inhaled the odor of several of the plants which her father had most sedulously avoided.

"Here, Beatrice," said the latter, "see how many needful offices require to be done to our chief treasure. Yet, shattered as I am, my life might pay the penalty of approaching it so closely as circumstances demand. Henceforth, I fear, this plant must be consigned to your sole charge."

"And gladly will I undertake it," cried again the rich tones of the young lady, as she bent towards the magnificent plant and opened her arms as if to embrace it. "Yes, my sister, my splendor, it shall be Beatrice's task to nurse and serve thee; and thou shalt reward her with thy kisses and perfumed breath, which to her is as the breath of life."

Then, with all the tenderness in her manner that was so strikingly expressed in her words, she busied herself with such attentions as the plant seemed to require; and Giovanni, at his lofty window, rubbed his eyes, and almost doubted whether it were a girl tending her favorite flower, or one sister performing the duties of affection to another. The scene soon terminated. Whether Dr. Rappaccini had finished his labors in the garden, or that his watchful eye had caught the stranger's face, he now took his daughter's arm and retired. Night was already closing in; oppressive exhalations seemed to proceed from the plants and steal upward past the open window; and Giovanni, closing the lattice, went to his couch and dreamed of a rich flower and beautiful girl. Flowers and maiden were different, and yet the same, and fraught with some strange peril in either shape.

But there is an influence in the light of morning that tends to rectify whatever errors of fancy, or even of judgment, we may have incurred during the sun's decline, or among the shadows of the night, or in the less wholesome glow of moonshine. Giovanni's first movement, on starting from sleep, was to throw open the window and gaze down into the garden which his dreams had made so fertile of mysteries. He was surprized, and a little ashamed, to find how real and matter-of-fact an affair it proved to be, in the first rays of the sun which gilded the dewdrops that hung upon leaf and blossom, and, while giving a brighter beauty to each rare flower, brought everything within the limits of ordinary experience. The young man rejoiced that, in the heart of the barren city, he had the privilege of overlooking this spot of lovely and luxuriant vegetation. It would serve, he said to himself, as a symbolic language to keep him in communion with Nature. Neither the sickly and thoughtworn Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini, it is true, nor his brilliant daughter, were now visible; so that Giovanni could not determine how much of the singularity which he attributed to both was due to their own qualities and how much to his wonder-working fancy; but he was inclined to take a most rational view of the whole matter.

In the course of the day he paid his respects to Signor Pietro Baglioni, professor of medicine in the university, a physician of eminent repute, to whom Giovanni had brought a letter of introduction. The professor was an elderly personage, apparently of genial nature and habits that might almost be called jovial. He kept the young man to dinner, and made himself very agreeable by the freedom and liveliness of his conversation, especially when warmed by a flask or two of Tuscan wine. Giovanni, conceiving that men of science, inhabitants of the same city, must needs be on familiar terms with one another, took an opportunity to mention the name of Dr. Rappaccini. But the professor did not respond with so much cordiality as he had anticipated.

"Ill would it become a teacher of the divine art of medicine," said Professor Pietro Baglioni, in answer to a question of Giovanni, "to withhold due and well-considered praise of a physician so eminently skilled as Rappaccini; but, on the other hand, I should answer it but scantily to my conscience were I to permit a worthy youth like yourself, Signor Giovanni, the son of an ancient friend, to imbibe erroneous ideas respecting a man who might hereafter chance to hold your life and death in his hands. The truth is, our worshipful Dr. Rappaccini has as much science as any member of the faculty—with perhaps one single exception—in Padua, or all Italy; but there are certain grave objections to his professional character."

"And what are they?" asked the young man.

"Has my friend Giovanni any disease of body or heart, that he is so inquisitive about physicians?" said the professor, with a smile. "But as for Rappaccini, it is said of him—and I, who know the man well, can answer for its truth—that he cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects of some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge."

"Methinks he is an awful man indeed," remarked Guasconti, mentally recalling the cold and purely intellectual aspect of Rappaccini. "And yet, worshipful professor, is it not a noble spirit? Are there many men capable of so spiritual a love of science?"

"God forbid," answered the professor, somewhat testily; "at least, unless they take sounder views of the healing art than those adopted by Rappaccini. It is his theory that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands, and is said even to have produced new varieties of poison, more horribly deleterious than Nature, without the assistance of this learned person, would ever have plagued the world withal. That the signor doctor does less mischief than might be expected with such dangerous substances, is undeniable. Now and then, it must be owned, he has effected, or seemed to effect, a marvelous cure; but, to tell you my private mind, Signor Giovanni, he should receive little credit for such instances of success—they being probably the work of chance—but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which may justly be considered his own work."

The youth might have taken Baglioni's opinions with many grains of allowance had he known that there was a professional warfare of long continuance between him and Dr. Rappaccini, in which the latter was generally thought to have gained the advantage. If the reader be inclined to judge for himself, we refer him to certain black-letter tracts on both sides, preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua.

"I know not, most learned professor," returned Giovanni, after musing on what had been said of Rappaccini's exclusive zeal for science—"I know not how dearly this physician may love his art; but surely there is one object more dear to him. He has a daughter."

"Aha!" cried the professor, with a laugh. "So now our friend Giovanni's secret is out. You have heard of this daughter, whom all the young men in Padua are wild about, though not half a dozen have ever had the good hap to see her face. I know little of the Signora Beatrice save that Rappaccini is said to have instructed her deeply in his science, and that, young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perchance her father destines her for mine! Other absurd rumors there be, not worth talking about or listening to. So now, Signor Giovanni, drink off your glass of lachryma."

Guasconti returned to his lodgings somewhat heated with the wine he had quaffed, and which caused his brain to swim with strange fantasies in reference to Dr. Rappaccini and the beautiful Beatrice. On his way, happening to pass by a florist's, he bought a fresh bouquet of flowers.

Ascending to his chamber, he seated himself near the window, but within the shadow thrown by the depth of the wall, so that he could look down into the garden with little risk of being discovered. All beneath his eye was a solitude. The strange plants were basking in the sunshine, and now and then nodding gently to one another, as if in acknowledgment of sympathy and kindred. In the midst, by the shattered fountain, grew the magnificent shrub, with its purple gems clustering all over it; they glowed in the air, and gleamed back again out of the depth of the pool, which thus seemed to overflow with colored radiance from the rich reflection that was steeped in it. At first, as we have said, the garden was a solitude. Soon, however—as Giovanni had half hoped, half feared, would be the case—a figure appeared beneath the antique sculptural portal, and came down between the rows of plants, inhaling their various perfumes as if she were one of those beings of old classic fable that lived upon sweet odors. On again beholding Beatrice, the young man was even startled to perceive how much her beauty exceeded his recollection of it;

so brilliant, so vivid, was its character, that she glowed amid the sunlight, and, as Giovanni whispered to himself, positively illuminated the more shadowy intervals of the garden path. Her face being now more revealed than on the former occasion, he was struck by its expression of simplicity and sweetness—qualities that had not entered into his idea of her character, and which made him ask anew what manner of mortal she might be. Nor did he fail again to observe, or imagine, an analogy between the beautiful girl and the gorgeous shrub that hung its gemlike flowers over the fountain—a resemblance which Beatrice seemed to have indulged a fantastic humor in heightening, both by the arrangement of her dress and the selection of its hues.

Approaching the shrub, she threw open her arms, as with a passionate ardor, and drew its branches into an intimate embrace—so intimate that her features were hidden in its leafy bosom and her glistening ringlets all intermingled with the flowers.

"Give me thy breath, my sister," exclaimed Beatrice, "for I am faint with common air. And give me this flower of thine, which I separate with gentlest fingers from the stem and place close beside my heart."

With these words the beautiful daughter of Rappaccini plucked one of the richest blossoms of the shrub, and was about to fasten it in her bosom. But now, unless Giovanni's drafts of wine had bewildered his senses, a singular incident occurred. A small orange-colored reptile, of a lizard or chameleon species, chanced to be creeping along the path, just at the feet of Beatrice. It appeared to Giovanni—but, at the distance from which he gazed, he could scarcely have seen anything so minute—it appeared to him, however, that a drop or two of moisture from the broken stem of the flower descended upon the lizard's head. For an instant the reptile contorted itself violently, and then lay motionless in the sunshine. Beatrice observed this remarkable phenomenon, and crossed herself, sadly, but without surprize; nor did she therefore hesitate to arrange the fatal flower in her bosom. There it blushed, and almost glimmered with the dazzling effect of a precious stone, adding to her dress and aspect the one appropriate charm which nothing else in the world could have supplied. But Giovanni, out of the shadow of his window, bent forward and shrank back, and murmured and trembled.

"Am I awake? Have I my senses?" said he to himself. "What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?"

Beatrice now strayed carelessly through the garden, approaching closer beneath Giovanni's window, so that he was compelled to thrust his head quite out of its concealment in order to gratify the intense and painful curiosity which she excited. At this moment there came a beautiful insect over the garden wall: it had, perhaps, wandered through the city, and found no flowers or verdure among those antique haunts of men until the heavy perfumes of Dr. Rappaccini's shrubs had lured it from afar. Without alighting on the flowers, this winged brightness seemed to be attracted by Beatrice, and lingered in the air and fluttered about her head. Now, here it could not be but that Giovanni Guasconti's eyes deceived him. Be that as it might, he fancied that, while Beatrice was gazing at the insect with childish delight, it grew faint and fell at her feet; its bright wings shivered; it was dead—from no cause that he could discern, unless it were the atmosphere of her breath. Again Beatrice crossed herself and sighed heavily as she bent over the dead insect.

An impulsive movement of Giovanni drew her eyes to the window. There she beheld the beautiful head of the young man—rather a Grecian than an Italian head, with fair, reg-

ular features, and a glistening of gold among his ringlets—gazing down upon her like a being that hovered in mid air. Scarcely knowing what he did, Giovanni threw down the bouquet which he had hitherto held in his hand.

"Signora," said he, "there are pure and healthful flowers. Wear them for the sake of Giovanni Guasconti."

"Thanks, signor," replied Beatrice, with her rich voice, that came forth as it were like a gush of music, and with a mirthful expression half childish and half womanlike. "I accept your gift, and would fain recompense it with this precious purple flower; but, if I toss it into the air, it will not reach you. So Signor Guasconti must even content himself with my thanks."

She lifted the bouquet from the ground, and then, as if inwardly ashamed at having stepped aside from her maiden reserve to respond to a stranger's greeting, passed swiftly homeward through the garden. But, few as the moments were, it seemed to Giovanni, when she was on the point of vanishing beneath the sculptured portal, that his beautiful bouquet was already beginning to wither in her grasp. It was an idle thought; there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance.

For many days after this incident the young man avoided the window that looked into Dr. Rappaccini's garden, as if something ugly and monstrous would have blasted his eyesight had he been betrayed into a glance. He felt conscious of having put himself, to a certain extent, within the influence of an unintelligible power by the communication which he had opened with Beatrice. The wisest course would have been, if his heart were in any real danger, to quit his lodgings and Padua itself at once; the next wiser, to have accustomed himself, as far as possible, to the familiar and daylight view of Beatrice—thus bringing her rigidly and systematically within the limits of ordinary experience. Least of all, while avoiding her sight, ought Giovanni to have remained so near this extraordinary being that the proximity and possibility even of intercourse should give a kind of substance and reality to the wild vagaries which his imagination ran riot continually in producing. Guasconti had not a deep heart—or, at all events, its depths were not sounded now; but he had a quick fancy, and an ardent southern temperament, which rose every instant to a higher fever pitch. Whether or no Beatrice possessed those terrible attributes, that fatal breath, the affinity with those so beautiful and deadly flowers which were indicated by what Giovanni had witnessed, she had at least instilled a fierce and subtle poison into his system. It was not love, although her rich beauty was a madness to him; nor horror, even while he fancied her spirit to be imbued with the same baneful essence that seemed to pervade her physical frame; but a wild offspring of both love and horror that had each parent in it, and burned like one and shivered like the other. Giovanni knew not what to dread; still less did he know what to hope; yet hope and dread kept a continual warfare in his breast, alternately vanquishing one another and starting up afresh to renew the contest. Blessed are all simple emotions, be they dark or bright! It is the lurid intermixture of the two that produces the illuminating blaze of the infernal regions.

Sometimes he endeavored to assuage the fever of his spirit by a rapid walk through the streets of Padua or beyond its gates: his footsteps kept time with the throbbing of his brain, so that the walk was apt to accelerate itself to a race. One day he found himself arrested; his arm was seized by a portly personage, who had turned back on recognizing the young

man and expended much breath in overtaking him.

"Signor Giovanni! Stay, my young friend!" cried he. "Have you forgotten me? That might well be the case if I were as much altered as yourself."

It was Baglioni, whom Giovanni had avoided ever since the first meeting, from a doubt that the professor's sagacity would look too deeply into his secrets. Endeavoring to recover himself, he stared forth wildly from his inner world into the outer one and spoke like a man in a dream.

"Yes; I am Giovanni Guasconti. You are Professor Pietro Baglioni. Now let me pass!"

"Not yet, not yet, Signor Giovanni Guasconti," said the professor, smiling, but at the same time scrutinizing the youth with an earnest glance. "What! did I grow up side by side with your father? and shall his son pass me like a stranger in these old streets of Padua? Stand still, Signor Giovanni; for we must have a word or two before we part."

"Speedily, then, most worshipful professor, speedily," said Giovanni, with feverish impatience. "Does not your worship see that I am in haste?"

Now, while he was speaking there came a man in black along the street, stooping and moving feebly like a person in inferior health. His face was all overspread with a most sickly and sallow hue, but yet so pervaded with an expression of piercing and active intellect that an observer might easily have overlooked the merely physical attributes and have seen only this wonderful energy. As he passed, this person exchanged a cold and distant salutation with Baglioni, but fixed his eyes upon Giovanni with an intentness that seemed to bring out whatever was within him worthy of notice. Nevertheless, there was a peculiar quietness in the look, as if taking merely a speculative, not a human, interest in the young man.

"It is Dr. Rappaccini!" whispered the professor when the stranger had passed. "Has he ever seen your face before?"

"Not that I know," answered Giovanni, starting at the name.

"He *has* seen you! he must have seen you!" said Baglioni, hastily. "For some purpose or other, this man of science is making a study of you. I know that look of his! It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, a mouse, or a butterfly, which, in pursuance of some experiment, he has killed by the perfume of a flower; a look as deep as Nature itself, but without Nature's warmth of love. Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments!"

"Will you make a fool of me?" cried Giovanni, passionately. "*That*, signor professor, were an untoward experiment."

"Patience! patience!" replied the imperturbable professor. "I tell thee, my poor Giovanni, that Rappaccini has a scientific interest in thee. Thou hast fallen into fearful hands! And the Signora Beatrice—what part does she act in this mystery?"

But Guasconti, finding Baglioni's pertinacity intolerable, here broke away, and was gone before the professor could again seize his arm. He looked after the young man intently and shook his head.

"This must not be," said Baglioni to himself. "The youth is the son of my old friend, and shall not come to any harm from which the arcana of medical science can preserve him. Besides, it is too insufferable an impertinence in Rappaccini thus to snatch the lad out of my own hands, as I may say, and make use of him for his infernal experiments. This daughter of his! It shall be looked to. Perchance, most learned Rappaccini, I may foil you where you little dream of it!"

Meanwhile Giovanni had pursued a circuitous route, and at length found himself at the door of his lodgings. As he crossed the threshold he was met by old Lisabetta, who smirked and smiled, and was evidently desirous to attract his attention; vainly, however, as the ebullition of his feelings had momentarily subsided into a cold and dull vacuity. He turned his eyes full upon the withered face that was puckering itself into a smile, but seemed to behold it not. The old dame, therefore, laid her grasp upon his cloak.

"Signor! signor!" whispered she, still with a smile over the whole breadth of her visage, so that it looked not unlike a grotesque carving in wood, darkened by centuries. "Listen, signor! There is a private entrance into the garden!"

"What do you say?" exclaimed Giovanni, turning quickly about, as if an inanimate thing should start into feverish life. "A private entrance into Dr. Rappaccini's garden?"

"Hush! hush! not so loud!" whispered Lisabetta, putting her hand over his mouth. "Yes; into the worshipful doctor's garden, where you may see all his fine shrubbery. Many a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those flowers."

Giovanni put a piece of gold in her hand.

"Show me the way," said he.

A surmise, probably excited by his conversation with Baglioni, crossed his mind, that this interposition of old Lisabetta might perchance be connected with the intrigue, whatever were its nature, in which the professor seemed to suppose that Dr. Rappaccini was involving him. But such a suspicion, though it disturbed Giovanni, was inadequate to restrain him. The instant that he was aware of the possibility of approaching Beatrice, it seemed an absolute necessity of his existence to do so. It mattered not whether she were angel or demon; he was irrevocably within her sphere, and must obey the law that whirled him onward, in everlasting circles, toward a result which he did not attempt to foreshadow; and yet, strange to say, there came across him a sudden doubt whether this intense interest on his part were not delusory; whether it were really of so deep and positive a nature as to justify him in thrusting himself into an incalculable position; whether it were not merely the fantasy of a young man's brain, only slightly or not at all connected with his heart.

He paused, hesitated, turned half about, but again went on. His withered guide led him along several obscure passages, and finally undid a door, through which, as it was opened, there came the sight and sound of rustling leaves, with the broken sunshine glimmering among them. Giovanni stepped forth, and, forcing himself through the entanglement of a shrub that wreathed its tendrils over the hidden entrance, stood beneath his own window in the open area of Dr. Rappaccini's garden.

How often is it the case that, when impossibilities have come to pass and dreams have condensed their misty substance into tangible realities, we find ourselves calm, and even coldly self-possessed, amid circumstances which it would have been a delirium of joy or agony to anticipate! Fate delights to thwart us thus. Passion will choose his own time to rush upon the scene, and lingers sluggishly behind when an appropriate adjustment of events would seem to summon his appearance. So was it now with Giovanni. Day after day his pulses had throbbed with feverish blood at the improbable idea of an interview with Beatrice, and of standing with her, face to face, in this very garden, basking in the Oriental sunshine of her beauty, and snatching from her full gaze the mystery which he deemed the riddle of his own existence. But now there was a singular and un-

timely equanimity within his breast. He threw a glance around the garden to discover if Beatrice or her father were present, and, perceiving that he was alone, began a critical observation of the plants.

The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him, their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket. Several also would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy, glowing with only an evil mockery of beauty. They were probably the result of experiment, which in one or two cases had succeeded in mingling plants individually lovely into a compound possessing the questionable and ominous character that distinguished the whole growth of the garden. In fine, Giovanni recognized but two or three plants in the collection, and those of a kind that he well knew to be poisonous. While busy with these contemplations he heard the rustling of a silken garment, and, turning, beheld Beatrice emerging from beneath the sculptured portal.

Giovanni had not considered with himself what should be his deportment; whether he should apologize for his intrusion into the garden, or assume that he was there with the privity at least, if not by the desire, of Dr. Rappaccini or his daughter; but Beatrice's manner placed him at his ease, though leaving him still in doubt by what agency he had gained admittance. She came lightly along the path and met him near the broken fountain. There was surprize in her face, but brightened by a simple and kind expression of pleasure.

"You are a connoisseur in flowers, signor," said Beatrice, with a smile, alluding to the bouquet which he had flung her from the window. "It is no marvel, therefore, if the sight of my father's rare collection has tempted you to take a nearer view. If he were here, he could tell you many strange and interesting facts as to the nature and habits of these shrubs; for he has spent a lifetime in such studies, and this garden is his world."

"And yourself, lady," observed Giovanni, "if fame say true—you likewise are deeply skilled in the virtues indicated by these rich blossoms and these spicy perfumes. Would you deign to be my instructress, I should prove an apter scholar than if taught by Signor Rappaccini himself."

"Are there such idle rumors?" asked Beatrice, with the music of a pleasant laugh. "Do people say that I am skilled in my father's science of plants? What a jest is there! No; though I have grown up among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues and perfume; and sometimes methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many flowers here, and those not the least brilliant, that shock and offend me when they meet my eye. But pray, signor, do not believe these stories about my science. Believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes."

"And must I believe all that I have seen with my own eyes?" asked Giovanni, pointedly, while the recollection of former scenes made him shrink. "No, signora; you demand too little of me. Bid me believe nothing save what comes from your own lips."

It would appear that Beatrice understood him. There came a deep flush to her cheek; but she looked full into Giovanni's eyes, and responded to his gaze of uneasy suspicion with a queenlike haughtiness.

"I do so bid you, signor," she replied. "Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me. If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence; but the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips art true from the depths of the heart outward. Those you may believe."

A fervor glowed in her whole aspect and beamed upon Giovanni's consciousness like the light of truth itself; but while she spoke there was a fragrance in the atmosphere around her, rich and delightful, though evanescent, yet which the young man, from an indefinable reluctance, scarcely dared to draw into his lungs. It might be the odor of the flowers. Could it be Beatrice's breath which thus embalmed her words with a strange richness, as if by steeping them in her heart? A faintness passed like a shadow over Giovanni and flitted away; he seemed to gaze through the beautiful girl's eyes into her transparent soul, and felt no more doubt or fear.

The tinge of passion that had colored Beatrice's manner vanished; she became gay, and appeared to derive a pure delight from her communion with the youth not unlike what the maiden of a lonely island might have felt conversing with a voyager from the civilized world. Evidently her experience of life had been confined within the limits of that garden. She talked now about matters as simple as the daylight of summer clouds, and now asked questions in reference to the city, or Giovanni's distant home, his friends, his mother, and his sisters —questions indicating such seclusion, and such lack of familiarity with modes and forms, that Giovanni responded as if to an infant. Her spirit gushed out before him like a fresh rill that was just catching its first glimpse of the sunlight and wondering at the reflections of earth and sky which were flung into its bosom. There came thoughts, too, from a deep source, and fantasies of a gemlike brilliancy, as if diamonds and rubies sparkled upward among the bubbles of the fountain. Ever and anon there gleamed across the young man's mind a sense of wonder that he should be walking side by side with the being who had so wrought upon his imagination, whom he had idealized in such hues of terror, in whom he had positively witnessed such manifestations of dreadful attributes—that he should be conversing with Beatrice like a brother, and should find her so human and so maidenlike. But such reflections were only momentary; the effect of her character was too real not to make itself familiar at once.

In this free intercourse they had strayed through the garden, and now, after many turns among its avenues, were come to the shattered fountain, beside which grew the magnificent shrub, with its treasury of glowing blossoms. A fragrance was diffused from it which Giovanni recognized as identical with that which he had attributed to Beatrice's breath, but incomparably more powerful. As her eyes fell upon it, Giovanni beheld her press her hand to her bosom as if her heart were throbbing suddenly and painfully.

"For the first time in my life," murmured she, addressing the shrub, "I had forgotten thee."

"I remember, signora," said Giovanni, "that you once promised to reward me with one of these living gems for the bouquet which I had the happy boldness to fling to your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview."

He made a step toward the shrub with extended hand; but Beatrice darted forward, uttering a shriek that went through his heart like a dagger. She caught his hand and drew it back with the whole force of her slender figure. Giovanni felt her touch thrilling through his fibers.

"Touch it not!" exclaimed she, in a voice of agony. "Not for thy life! It is fatal!"

Then, hiding her face, she fled from him and vanished beneath the sculptured portal. As Giovanni followed her with his eyes, he beheld the emaciated figure and pale intelligence of Dr. Rappaccini, who had been watching the scene, he knew not how long, within the shadow of the entrance.

No sooner was Guasconti alone in his chamber than the image of Beatrice came back to his passionate musings, invested with all the witchery that had been gathered around it ever since his first glimpse of her, and now likewise imbued with a tender warmth of girlish womanhood. She was human; her nature was endowed with all gentle and feminine qualities; she was worthiest to be worshiped; she was capable, surely, on her part, of the height and heroism of love. Those tokens which he had hitherto considered as proofs of a frightful peculiarity in her physical and moral system were now either forgotten or by the subtle sophistry of passion transmuted into a golden crown of enchantment, rendering Beatrice the more admirable by so much as she was the more unique. Whatever had looked ugly was now beautiful; or, if incapable of such a change, it stole away and hid itself among those shapeless half ideas which throng the dim region beyond the daylight of our perfect consciousness. Thus did he spend the night, nor fell asleep until the dawn had begun to awake the slumbering flowers in Dr. Rappaccini's garden, whither Giovanni's dreams doubtless led him. Up rose the sun in his due season, and, flinging his beams upon the young man's eyelids, awoke him to a sense of pain. When thoroughly aroused, he became sensible of a burning and tingling agony in his hand—in his right hand—the very hand which Beatrice had grasped in her own when he was on the point of plucking one of the gemlike flowers. On the back of that hand there was now a purple print like that of four small fingers, and the likeness of a slender thumb upon his wrist.

O, how stubbornly does love—or even that cunning semblance of love which flourishes in the imagination, but strikes no depth of root into the heart—how stubbornly does it hold its faith until the moment comes when it is doomed to vanish into thin mist! Giovanni wrapped a handkerchief about his hand and wondered what evil thing had stung him, and soon forgot his pain in a revery of Beatrice.

After the first interview, a second was in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A third; a fourth; and a meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in Giovanni's daily life, but the whole space in which he might be said to live; for the anticipation and memory of that ecstatic hour made up the remainder. Nor was it otherwise with the daughter of Rappaccini. She watched for the youth's appearance and flew to his side with confidence as unreserved as if they had been playmates from early infancy—as if they were such playmates still. If, by any unwonted chance, he failed to come at the appointed moment, she stood beneath the window and sent up the rich sweetness of her tones to float around him in his chamber and echo and reverberate throughout his heart: "Giovanni! Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!" And down he hastened into that Eden of poisonous flowers.

But, with all this intimate familiarity, there was still a reserve in Beatrice's demeanor, so rigidly and invariably sustained that the idea of infringing it scarcely occurred to his imagination. By all appreciable signs, they loved; they had looked love with eyes that conveyed the holy secret from the depths of one soul into the depths of the other, as if it were too

sacred to be whispered by the way; they had even spoken love in those gushes of passion when their spirits darted forth in articulated breath like tongues of long-hidden flame; and yet there had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands, nor any slight caress such as love claims and hallows. He had never touched one of the gleaming ringlets of her hair; her garment—so marked was the physical barrier between them—had never been waved against him by a breeze. On the few occasions when Giovanni had seemed tempted to overstep the limit, Beatrice grew so sad, so stern, and withal wore such a look of desolate separation, shuddering at itself, that not a spoken word was requisite to repel him. At such times he was startled at the horrible suspicions that rose, monster-like, out of the caverns of his heart and stared him in the face; his love grew thin and faint as the morning mist; his doubts alone had substance. But, when Beatrice's face brightened again after the momentary shadow, she was transformed at once from the mysterious, questionable being whom he had watched with so much awe and horror; she was now the beautiful and unsophisticated girl whom he felt that his spirit knew with a certainty beyond all other knowledge.

A CONSIDERABLE time had now passed since Giovanni's last meeting with Baglioni. One morning, however, he was disagreeably surprized by a visit from the professor, whom he had scarcely thought of for whole weeks, and would willingly have forgotten still longer. Given up as he had long been to a pervading excitement, he could tolerate no companions except upon condition of their perfect sympathy with his present state of feeling. Such sympathy was not to be expected from Professor Baglioni.

The visitor chatted carelessly for a few moments about the gossip of the city and the university, and then took up another topic.

"I have been reading an old classic author lately," said he, "and met with a story that strangely interested me. Possibly you may remember it. It is of an Indian prince, who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. She was as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset; but what especially distinguished her was a certain rich perfume in her breath—richer than a garden of Persian roses. Alexander, as was natural to a youthful conqueror, fell in love at first sight with this magnificent stranger; but a certain sage physician, happening to be present, discovered a terrible secret in regard to her."

"And what was that?" asked Giovanni, turning his eyes downward to avoid those of the professor.

"That this lovely woman," continued Baglioni, with emphasis, "had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison in existence. Poison was her element of life. With that rich perfume of her breath she blasted the very air. Her love would have been poison—her embrace death. Is not this a marvelous tale?"

"A childish fable," answered Giovanni, nervously starting from his chair. "I marvel how your worship finds time to read such nonsense among your grave studies."

"By the by," said the professor, looking uneasily about him, "what singular fragrance is this in your apartment? Is it the perfume of your gloves? It is faint, but delicious; and yet, after all, by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long, methinks it would make me ill. It is like the breath of a flower; but I see no flowers in the chamber."

"Nor are there any," replied Giovanni, who had turned pale as the professor spoke; "nor, I think, is there any fragrance except in your worship's imagination. Odors, being a sort of element combined of the sen-

sual and the spiritual, are apt to deceive us in this manner. The recollection of a perfume, the bare idea of it, may easily be mistaken for a present reality."

"Ay; but my sober imagination does not often play such tricks," said Baglioni; "and, were I to fancy any kind of odor, it would be that of some vile apothecary drug, wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our worshipful friend Rappaccini, as I have heard, tinctures his medicaments with odors richer than those of Araby. Doubtless, likewise, the fair and learned Signora Beatrice would minister to her patients with drafts as sweet as a maiden's breath; but wo to him that sips them!"

Giovanni's face evinced many contending emotions. The tone in which the professor alluded to the pure and lovely daughter of Rappaccini was a torture to his soul; and yet the intimation of a view of her character, opposite to his own, gave instantaneous distinctness to a thousand dim suspicions, which now grinned at him like so many demons. But he strove hard to quell them and to respond to Baglioni with a true lover's perfect faith.

"Signor professor," said he, "you were my father's friend; perchance, too, it is your purpose to act a friendly part towards his son. I would fain feel nothing towards you save respect and deference; but I pray you to observe, signor, that there is one subject on which we must not speak. You know not the Signora Beatrice. You can not, therefore, estimate the wrong—the blasphemy, I may even say—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word."

"Giovanni! my poor Giovanni!" answered the professor, with a calm expression of pity, "I know this wretched girl far better than yourself. You shall hear the truth in respect to the poisonous Rappaccini and his poisonous daughter; yes, poisonous as she is beautiful. Listen; for, even should you do violence to my gray hairs, it shall not silence me. That old fable of the Indiain woman has become a truth by the deep and deadly science of Rappaccini and in the person of the lovely Beatrice."

Giovanni groaned and hid his face.

"Her father," continued Baglioni, "was not restrained by natural affection from offering up his child in this horrible manner as the victim of his insane zeal for science; for, let us do him justice, he is as true a man of science as ever distilled his own heart in an alembic. What, then, will be your fate? Beyond a doubt you are selected as the material of some new experiment. Perhaps the result is to be death; perhaps a fate more awful still. Rappaccini, with what he calls the interest of science before his eyes, will hesitate at nothing."

"It is a dream," muttered Giovanni to himself; "surely it is a dream."

"But," resumed the professor, "be of good cheer, son of my friend. It is not yet too late for the rescue. Possibly we may even succeed in bringing back this miserable child within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her. Behold this little silver vase! It was wrought by the hands of the renowned Benvenuto Cellini, and is well worthy to be a love gift to the fairest dame in Italy. But its contents are invaluable. One little sip of this antidote would have rendered the most virulent poisons of Borgias innocuous. Doubt not that it will be as efficacious against those of Rappaccini. Bestow the vase, and the precious liquid within it, on your Beatrice, and hopefully await the result."

Baglioni laid a small, exquisitely wrought silver vial on the table and withdrew, leaving what he had said to produce its effect upon the young man's mind.

"We will thwart Rappaccini yet," thought he, chuckling to himself, as he

descended the stairs; "but, let us confess the truth of him, he is a wonderful man—a wonderful man indeed; a vile empiric, however, in his practise, and therefore not to be tolerated by those who respect the good old rules of the medical profession."

Throughout Giovanni's whole acquaintance with Beatrice, he had occasionally, as we have said, been haunted by dark surmises as to her character; yet so thoroughly had she made herself felt by him as a simple, natural, most affectionate, and guileless creature, that the image now held by Professor Baglioni looked as strange and incredible as if it were not in accordance with his own original conception. True, there were ugly recollections connected with his first glimpses of the beautiful girl; he could not quite forget the bouquet that withered in her grasp, and the insect that perished amid the sunny air, by no ostensible agency save the fragrance of her breath. These incidents, however, dissolving in the pure light of her character, had no longer the efficacy of facts, but were acknowledged as mistaken fantasies, by whatever testimony of the senses they might appear to be substantiated. There is something truer and more real than what we can see with the eyes and touch with the finger. On such better evidence had Giovanni founded his confidence in Beatrice, though rather by the necessary force of her high attributes than by any deep and generous faith on his part. But now his spirit was incapable of sustaining itself at the height to which the early enthusiasm of passion had exalted it; he fell down, groveling among earthly doubts, and defiled therewith the pure whiteness of Beatrice's image. Not that he gave her up; he did but distrust. He resolved to institute some decisive test that should satisfy him, once for all, whether there were those dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature which could not be supposed to exist without some corresponding monstrosity of soul. His eyes, gazing down afar, might have deceived him as to the lizard, the insect, and the flowers; but if he could witness, at the distance of a few paces, the sudden blight of one fresh and healthful flower in Beatrice's hand, there would be room for no further question. With this idea he hastened to the florist's and purchased a bouquet that was still gemmed with the morning dewdrops.

It was now the customary hour of his daily interview with Beatrice. Before descending into the garden, Giovanni failed not to look at his figure in the mirror—a vanity to be expected in a beautiful young man, yet, as displaying itself at that troubled and feverish moment, the token of a certain shallowness of feeling and insincerity of character. He did gaze, however, and said to himself that his features had never before possessed so rich a grace, nor his eyes such a vivacity, nor his cheeks so warm a hue of superabundant life.

"At least," thought he, "her poison has not yet insinuated itself into my system. I am no flower to perish in her grasp."

With that thought he turned his eyes on the bouquet, which he had never once laid aside from his hand. A thrill of indefinable horror shot through his frame on perceiving that those dewy flowers were already beginning to droop; they wore the aspect of things that had been fresh and lovely yesterday. Giovanni grew white as marble, and stood motionless before the mirror, staring at his own reflection there as at the likeness of something frightful. He remembered Baglioni's remark about the fragrance that seemed to pervade the chamber. It must have been the poison in his breath! Then he shuddered—shuddered at himself. Recovering from his stupor, he began to watch with curious eyes a spider that was busily at work hanging its web from the an-

tique cornice of the apartment, crossing and recrossing the artful system of interwoven lines—as vigorous and active a spider as ever dangled from an old ceiling. Giovanni bent toward the insect, and emitted a deep, long breath. The spider suddenly ceased its toil; the web vibrated with a tremor originating in the body of the small artizan. Again Giovanni sent forth a breath, deeper, longer, and imbued with a venomous feeling out of his heart: he knew not whether he were wicked, or only desperate. The spider made a convulsive gripe with his limbs and hung dead across the window.

"Accursed! accursed!" muttered Giovanni, addressing himself. "Hast thou grown so poisonous that this deadly insect perishes by thy breath?"

At that moment a rich, sweet voice came floating up from the garden.

"Giovanni! Giovanni! It is past the hour! Why tarriest thou? Come down!"

"Yes," muttered Giovanni again. "She is the only being whom my breath may not slay! Would that it might!"

He rushed down, and in an instant was standing before the bright and loving eyes of Beatrice. A moment ago his wrath and despair had been so fierce that he could have desired nothing so much as to wither her by a glance; but with her actual presence there came influences which had too real an existence to be at once shaken off; recollections of the delicate and benign power of her feminine nature, which had so often enveloped him in a religious calm; recollections of many a holy and passionate outgush of her heart, when the pure fountain had been unsealed from its depths and made visible in its transparency to his mental eye; recollections which, had Giovanni known how to estimate them, would have assured him that all this ugly mystery was but an earthly illusion, and that, whatever mist of evil might seem to have gathered over her, the real Beatrice was a heavenly angel. Incapable as he was of such high faith, still her presence had not utterly lost its magic. Giovanni's rage was quelled into an aspect of sullen insensibility. Beatrice, with a quick spiritual sense, immediately felt that there was a gulf of blackness between them which neither he nor she could pass. They walked on together, sad and silent, and came thus to the marble fountain and to its pool of water on the ground, in the midst of which grew the shrub that bore gemlike blossoms. Giovanni was affrighted at the eager enjoyment—the appetite, as it were—with which he found himself inhaling the fragrance of the flowers.

"Beatrice," asked he, abruptly, "whence came this shrub?"

"My father created it," answered she, with simplicity.

"Created it! created it!" repeated Giovanni. "What mean you, Beatrice?"

"He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of Nature," replied Beatrice; "and, at the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil, the offspring of his science, of his intellect, while I was but his earthly child. Approach it not!" continued she, observing with terror that Giovanni was drawing nearer to the shrub. "It has qualities that you little dream of. But I, dearest Giovanni—I grew up and blossomed with the plant and was nourished with its breath. It was my sister, and I loved it with a human affection; for, alas! —hast thou not suspected it?—there was an awful doom."

Here Giovanni frowned so darkly upon her that Beatrice paused and trembled. But her faith in his tenderness reassured her, and made her blush that she had doubted for an instant.

"There was an awful doom," she continued, "the effect of my father's

fatal love of science, which estranged me from all society of my kind. Until Heaven sent thee, dearest Giovanni, O, how lonely was thy poor Beatrice!"

"Was it a hard doom?" asked Giovanni, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Only of late have I known how hard it was," answered she, tenderly. "O, yes; but my heart was torpid, and therefore quiet."

Giovanni's rage broke forth from his sullen gloom like a lightning flash out of a dark cloud.

"Accursed one!" cried he, with venomous scorn and anger. "And, finding thy solitude wearisome, thou hast severed me likewise from all the warmth of life and enticed me into thy region of unspeakable horror!"

"Giovanni!" exclaimed Beatrice, turning her large bright eyes upon his face. The force of his words had not found its way into her mind; she was merely thunderstruck.

"Yes, poisonous thing!" repeated Giovanni, beside himself with passion. "Thou has done it! Thou hast blasted me! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! Thou hast made me as hateful, as ugly, as loathsome and deadly a creature as thyself—a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity! Now, if our breath be happily as fatal to ourselves as to all others, let us join our lips in one kiss of unutterable hatred, and so die!"

"What has befallen me?" murmured Beatrice, with a low moan out of her heart. "Holy Virgin, pity me, a poor heart-broken child!"

"Thou,—dost thou pray?" cried Giovanni, still with the most fiendish scorn. "Thy very prayers, as they come from thy lips, taint the atmosphere with death. Yes, yes; let us pray! Let us to church and dip our fingers in the holy water at the portal! They that come after us will perish as by a pestilence! Let us sign crosses in the air! It will be scattering curses abroad in the likeness of holy symbols!"

"Giovanni," said Beatrice, calmly, for her grief was beyond passion, "why dost thou join thyself with me thus in those terrible words? I, it is true, am the horrible thing thou namest me. But thou,—what hast thou to do, save with one other shudder at my hideous misery to go forth out of the garden and mingle with thy race, and forget that there ever crawled on earth such a monster as poor Beatrice?"

"Dost thou pretend ignorance?" asked Giovanni, scowling upon her. "Behold! this power have I gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini."

There was a swarm of summer insects flitting through the air in search of the food promised by the flower odors of the fatal garden. They circled round Giovanni's head, and were evidently attracted towards him by the same influence which had drawn them for an instant within the sphere of several of the shrubs. He sent forth a breath among them, and smiled bitterly at Beatrice as at least a score of the insects fell dead upon the ground.

"I see it! I see it!" shrieked Beatrice. "It is my father's fatal science! No, no, Giovanni; it was not I! Never! never! I dreamed only to love thee and be with thee a little time, and so to let thee pass away, leaving but thine image in mine heart; for, Giovanni, believe it, though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature, and craves love as its daily food. But my father, —he has united us in this fearful sympathy. Yes; spurn me, tread upon me, kill me! O, what is death after such words as thine? But it was not I. Not for a world of bliss would I have done it."

GIOVANNI'S passion had exhausted itself in its outburst from his sense, mournful, and not without tenderness, of the intimate and peculiar relationship between Beatrice and

himself. They stood, as it were, in an utter solitude, which would be made none the less solitary by the densest throng of human life. Ought not, then, the desert of humanity around them to press this insulated pair closer together? If they should be cruel to one another, who was there to be kind to them? Besides, thought Giovanni, might there not still be a hope of his returning within the limits of ordinary nature, and leading Beatrice, the redeemed Beatrice, by the hand? O, weak, and selfish, and unworthy spirit, that could dream of an earthly union and earthly happiness as possible, after such deep love had been so bitterly wronged as was Beatrice's love by Giovanni's blighting words! No, no; there could be no such hope. She must pass heavily, with that broken heart, across the borders of Time—she must bathe her hurts in some fount of paradise, and forget her grief in the light of immortality, and *there* be well.

But Giovanni did not know it.

"Dear Beatrice," said he, approaching her, while she shrank away as always at his approach, but now with a different impulse, "dearest Beatrice, our fate is not yet so desperate. Behold! there is a medicine, potent, as a wise physician has assured me, and almost divine in its efficacy. It is composed of ingredients the most opposite to those by which thy awful father has brought this calamity upon thee and me. It is distilled of blessed herbs. Shall we not quaff it together, and thus be purified from evil?"

"Give it me!" said Beatrice, extending her hand to receive the little silver vial which Giovanni took from his bosom. She added, with a peculiar emphasis, "I will drink; but do thou wait the result."

She put Baglioni's antidote to her lips; and, at the same moment, the figure of Rappaccini emerged from the portals and came slowly toward the marble fountain. As he drew near, the pale man of science seemed to gaze with a triumphant expression at the beautiful youth and maiden, as might an artist who should spend his life in achieving a picture or a group of statuary and finally be satisfied with his success. He paused; his bent form grew erect with conscious power; he spread out his hands over them in the attitude of a father imploring a blessing upon his children; but those were the same hands that had thrown poison into the stream of their lives. Giovanni trembled. Beatrice shuddered nervously, and pressed her hand upon her heart.

"My daughter," said Rappaccini, "thou art no longer lonely in the world. Pluck one of those precious gems from thy sister shrub and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now. My science and the sympathy between thee and him have so wrought within his system that he now stands apart from common men, as thou dost, daughter of my pride and triumph, from ordinary women. Pass on, then, through the world, most dear to one another and dreadful to all besides!"

"My father," said Beatrice, feebly—and still as she spoke she kept her hand upon her heart—"wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?"

"Miserable!" exclaimed Rappaccini. "What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy—misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath—misery, to be as terrible as thou art beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?"

"I would fain have been loved, not feared," murmured Beatrice, sinking down upon the ground. "But now it matters not. I am going, father, where the evil which thou hast striven to mingle with my being will pass

away like a dream—like the fragrance of these poisonous flowers, which will no longer taint my breath among the flowers of Eden. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart; but they, too, will fall away as I ascend. O, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?"

To Beatrice—so radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini's skill — as poison had been life, so the powerful antidote was death; and thus the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom, perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni. Just at that moment Professor Pietro Baglioni looked forth from the window, and called loudly, in a tone of triumph mixed with horror, to the thunderstricken man of science,—

"Rappaccini! Rappaccini! and is *this* the upshot of your experiment?"

CLAIR DE LUNE

By MINNIE FAEGRE KNOX

O never ye sleep in the moonlight,
  My pious old Granny would say,
For sleepers, bewitched by the moonlight,
  With madness thereafter are fay.

But why should I sleep when the moon shines,
  And waste all her beauty away?
There's more to be done when the moon shines
  Than slumber in houses and pray.

My body I'll bathe in the moon-rays,
  My mantle of dew shall be spun.
Encrowned in a nimbus of moon-rays,
  I'll dance till the night flee the sun.

And if I should yield to the moonbeams,
  Laid low by weird malisons' harm,
Let me sleep 'neath the turf in the moonbeams,
  Enthralled by the night's silver charm.